

## **Role of Distance Education in Promotion of Women Education in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Education plays a significant role in growth of mind and individual income as it helps an individual in contributing to society in a positive way. It positively affects the attitude of an individual in adjusting to the society and adds in economic and societal growth. The main objective of education is to reshape the personalities and attitudes of people to build a better society and grow the economy. In this way, women education becomes more important. There is a common saying, “If a man is educated, an individual is educated, and if a women is educated, the entire family is educated”. The distance learning mode of education has been recognized as a great resource to give equal access to education to the women from remote areas of developing countries including Pakistan. However, proper quality assurance systems are to be placed for distance and open education in order to avoid its misuse and to ensure uncompromised education. With this backdrop, the main objective of the present study was to assess the role of distance education in extending and promoting women education. The nature of the study was quantitative and survey type. The masters students {MA (Education)/MEd level} of Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) enrolled for spring semester-2018 to spring-2019, all the tutors of postgraduate Teacher Education Programs of AIOU, academicians relating to distance education and formal education programs were the population of this study. Due to lack of resources, and constraints of time and scope of the study, it was limited to four regions that were randomly sampled. A total number of 300 students from relevant programs were randomly selected i.e., 75 students from each region. 100 tutors of relevant programs were randomly sampled by selecting 25 tutors from each region. Questionnaires were used as research instruments. SPSS was used for data analysis. The data were analyzed and interpreted by applying statistical method of percentage and mean scores. The results show that the distance education has positively contributed towards women education. It has also improved their social, social skills, communication skills and the skills required for employment and entrepreneurship. The results further show that distance education has benefited the remotely located women in the country. However, the quality aspects of distance education need to be addressed to enhance further benefits to women who opt for distance education.

**Keywords:** *Distance Education, Women Education, Open Learning, AIOU*

## **1. Introduction**

Distance and open education refer to a method of education which does not necessarily need physical presence of teachers and students at one place (Malik, 2010). It applies teaching learning experiences including practical or work experiences based on various modes of education like asynchronous, blended, and synchronous. The distance and open learning was started during nineteenth century by Sweden, Germany and England. USA was the first country which embarked degree programs in distance education mode during 1883 to improve the access. The distance and open education, not only, is considered as method to improve access but also, it is efficient in economic terms. Various global agencies and a number of governments have globally promoted distance education. UNESCO (2002) has been encouraging developing nations to develop system of distance education for reducing the issues of access and equity. British Council assisted Government of Pakistan to establish Peoples University Islamabad during 70s which was later named as Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). The first distance education university was established in 1969 in England, while Allama Iqbal Open University was the second university of distance education. In many ways, it is a unique institution, particularly in terms of employing Distance Education as its basic teaching methodology (Bakhsh, 2014). Furthermore, AIOU has been the first of its kind in Asia and Africa. It is different from other institutions of Pakistan in its technique, approach, capacity, and by and large, the structure. AIOU is a Distance Education organization known for its multi-disciplinary training from fundamental to doctoral level projects. The training set-up in Pakistan is complex and has been deficient in terms of access to the female masses (Rashid, 2009).

Historically this system has been implemented in various countries with required quality caveats successfully which helped the system to be recognized at par with the conventional mode. The emergence of online systems and courses after the introduction of internet in the 90s have brought a radical change in transforming education around the world known as e-learning (Peters, 2015). In distance education there is no nonstop and instant direction of tutors. The system relies on preparation, supervision and instructions of a tutor. It is a learning process in which an important part of teaching is conducted by somewhat distant space and time. It means a transitional method is continuously used in the interaction between teacher and learner (Rao, 2010). One or more media can be used for this contact. Distance learning materials also stimulate the students to learn in a better way.

Open and Distance learning gives a response to the expanding request of instruction for large number of individuals on the planet. They are adjusting this procedure to counter their gross issue of instruction (Government of Pakistan, 2005). This framework is not quite the same as the customary arrangement of instruction in terms of course educational plan and access. Ministry of Education (MOE), Pakistan allows the estimation of open and distance learning (ODL) in the following words: "It has gotten important to give equivalent and improved access of advanced education to the individuals who cannot reach up to higher examinations because of different sorts of social and some different hindrances like the most perceptible one: costly advanced education. So to conquer all these, Distance and Open learning is a stride ahead towards giving advanced education." According to the latest enrollment statistics in Pakistan, nearly 40% of the tertiary and higher education is enrolled in various programs of distance and open education. This has partly helped Government of Pakistan to improve its enrollment numbers from 3 percent to 10 percent of eligible youth cohort for higher education (Safdar, Hussain & Hafeez, 2013).

Nowadays, just those nations can flourish where female human resource (HR) has aptitude, direction, and greatness in scholastic terms. Females work more than men and get paid less in contrast with male in patriarchal societies like ours. It is beyond imagination to expect a drastic change particularly, in terms of economic advancement as long as females are denied their right of equivalent access to instruction. Females are confronting the challenges of low status which limits their role in creating nations (Sharma, 2004). This is a universal fact that without participation of women, it is impossible for nations to compete and excel in the world. Education of women is sole source to reshape and rebuild a society and also necessary to change the behavior of society towards women. Therefore, the distance learning proves fruitful to enhance knowledge among women.

In developing countries like Pakistan, women education is more important to change the behavior of society. Women in Pakistan, especially in far off areas, are deprived of the educational opportunities. They are unable to participate in educational activities in formal institutions, so distance learning process provides them a vital chance to contribute to their development both socially as well as individually (Khan, 2007). It is desirable to provide a learning environment for women who may play an effective role in society and the nation building. Education is the medium as well as a multi-stage procedure in which women's freedom as well as authorization can be

realized. It can carry women near to advancement, success and appropriate position with the achievement of understanding. It is merely in education that a woman can have a better recognition, possessions to take improved judgment as well as self-possession to be highly significant (Azam, 2013). Women's liberation as well as authorization is significant for the development of a civilization.

Thus, education is a single way in which both the genders can create identical development. In a culture like Pakistan, which is male-controlled, women have been in low positions in the past. So female has not been cared of much to be as significant as males. Females have faced discrimination in earliest period. Hence, education is reflected to play key part in issues which were tackled by women, as well as the basic mechanism for participating females as well as carrying them into the key crick of improvement. Therefore, numerous problems of females particularly of their freedom have been observed throughout primitive times till the modern times. Pakistani civilization does not permit females to go-out from their homes to receive education (Rafeeq, 2009).

Therefore, it is merely with the beginning of teaching in distance mode that women position in Pakistan has acquired greater advantage. However, there is constantly a key change in theory as well as practice of distance education.. Females enjoy more freedom in distance mode of education and are in a better position to advance freely with no cultural sensitivities attached. A civilization cannot grow without the maneuvers viz, man as well as woman (Siddique, 2010). In Pakistani civilization, men are in controlling positions of environment where females appreciate very-low societal position. Instead of demanding and appreciating equivalent privileges under the laws of the land, a female remains quiet hesitant on each and every stage of her life. It is not a matter of conversation that females do not subsidise in the happiness of community. Females struggle the one wheel of the chariot. Females can do many of domestic chores and it is well-thought-out as unfertile particularly in Pakistani culture, it is a significant matter of conversation here. Therefore to mark her work appreciated, females will have to be accomplished (Qasmi, 2007). The awareness of the Pakistani community concerning the carbon duplicate of females in Pakistan is compulsory to be improved with the assistance of technical as well as practical education. The modification in theory and practice vis-à-vis women education, will have to be focused for the development of Pakistan. The rank of women in Pakistani cities is better than the rank of females in towns.

Majority of the people in Pakistan live in rural community. Therefore, educating women in rural and town areas, is emphasized.

### **1.1. Objectives of Study**

The study aims to assess the contribution of distance education in improving the access for women in Pakistan. The specific objectives of the study are as under: 1. To assess the role of distance education in promotion of women education

2. To determine the contribution of distance education in improving the access to women

### **1.2. Research Question**

What and which type of role does distance education play in promotion of women education?

## **2. Methodology**

This study is descriptive and quantitative in nature. The main purpose of the quantitative research was to explore the problems through statistical means and numerical figures to find out the solutions. The researchers focused on the perceptions of the respondents with the help of questionnaires. Therefore, the researchers used sample survey and collected data from students, tutors as well as academicians. The main purpose of this study was to explore the role of distance education in the promotion of women education. The population of the study consisted of four regions of AIOU. There are 20 regions of AIOU in Punjab. These include Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Chakwal and Mundi Bahauddin regions. Due to lack of resources, and constraints of time and scope of the study only four regions (Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Chakwal, and Mundi Bahauddin) were randomly selected for sample. Students (300) of relevant programs were randomly sampled by selecting 75 students from each region. Tutors (100) of relevant programs were randomly sampled by selecting 25 tutors from each region. Validity of the instrument was ensured with the help of experts in the field. According to the suggestions of experts, the researchers modified and improved the instruments. After necessary changes and modifications, the researchers finalized the tools. The reliability of the instruments was checked with the help of test-retest method. The data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS. The data was analyzed and interpreted by applying descriptive statistics, i.e. percentage and mean scores. Conclusions and recommendations were made on the basis of the findings of the study. The data were presented in the form of tables and subsequent interpretation was made.

### 3. Data Analysis

The results of the data analysis are presented in Table 1 below. The table presents the opinions of the respondents in various categories i.e., frequency, percentages and mean scores. The statements revolve around the perceptions of the respondents about the suitability of distance education and its results.

Table 1: *Opinions of the respondents regarding Promotion of Women Education in Distance Education*

Statements	Level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score
Distance education is suitable for women.	SA	25	27.8	2.14
	A	42	46.7	
	N	11	12.2	
	DA	09	10.0	
	SDA	03	3.3	
Distance education is increasing among women in rural areas.	SA	24	26.7	1.88
	A	30	33.3	
	N	24	26.7	
	DA	10	11.1	
	SDA	02	2.2	
Distance education helps women become more expressive in their daily life.	SA	35	38.9	2.12
	A	40	44.4	
	N	05	5.6	
	DA	10	11.1	
	SA	35	38.9	

Distance education promotes ethical values among women.	SA	20	22.2	2.34
	A	34	37.8	
	N	13	14.4	
	DA	20	22.2	
	SDA	03	3.3	
	SA	20	22.2	
Distance education promotes computer skills among women.	SA	12	13.3	2.72
	A	30	33.3	
	N	25	27.8	
	DA	17	18.8	
	SDA	06	6.7	
Distance education is enhancing social life skills among women.	SA	25	27.8	2.38
	A	27	30.0	
	N	20	22.2	
	DA	14	15.6	
	SDA	04	4.4	
Distance education is developing critical thinking in women.	SA	20	22.2	2.42
	A	38	42.2	
	N	11	12.2	
	DA	16	17.8	
	SDA	05	5.6	

Table 1 shows that 27.8% tutors strongly agreed, 46.7% tutors agreed, 12.2% of the tutors were neutral, and 10.0% tutors disagreed while only 3.3% tutors strongly disagreed to the statement that distance education is suitable for women. This means that a majority of the practitioners of distance education believe in the suitability of distance education for women in Pakistan. Similarly, 26.7%

tutors strongly agreed, 33.3% tutors agreed, 26.7% tutors were neutral, and 11.1% tutors disagreed while 2.2% tutors strongly disagreed to the statement that distance education is increasing among women in rural areas whereas its mean score was 1.88. This again hints upon the fact that where there is no convenient choice of formal education available, the women opt for distance education. 38.9% tutors strongly agreed, 44.4% tutors agreed, 5.6% tutors were neutral, 11.1% tutors disagreed as well as 0.0% tutors strongly disagreed to the statement that distance education teaches women to become more expressive while, its mean score was 2.28. This is indexical to the utility of distance education for women. 22.2% tutors strongly agreed, 37.8% tutors agreed, 14.4% tutors were neutral, 22.2% tutors disagreed and 3.3% tutors strongly disagreed that distance education is promoting ethical values among women whereas, its mean score was 2.46. Similarly, 13.3% tutors strongly agreed, 33.3% tutors agreed, 27.8% tutors were neutral, 18.9% of the tutors disagreed while 6.7% tutors strongly disagreed that distance education promotes computer skills among women whereas, its mean score was 2.72. 27.8% tutors strongly agreed, 30.0% tutors agreed, 22.2% tutors were neutral, 15.6% tutors disagreed however 4.4% tutors strongly disagreed that distance education is enhancing social life skills among women as well as, its mean score was 2.38. The table also shows that 22.2% tutors strongly agreed, 42.2% tutors agreed, 12.2% tutors were neutral, 17.8% tutors disagreed and 5.6% tutors disagreed to the statement that distance education is developing critical thinking in women as well as, its mean score was 2.42. This means that all the statements received positive feedback for the utility of distance education.

Table 2. *Opinions of the respondents regarding Promotion of Women Education in Distance Education*

Statements	Level	Frequency	Percentage	Mean Score
Distance education has positive impact on women attitudes.	SA	21	23.3	2.35
	A	29	32.3	
	N	27	30.0	
	DA	13	14.4	
	SDA	00	00	
	SA	20	22.2	



Distance education is helping women regarding social adjustment in the society.	A	28	31.1	2.50
	N	24	26.7	
	DA	13	14.4	
	SDA	05	5.6	
Education is promoting punctuality in women through distance mode of education.	SA	27	30.0	2.22
	A	29	32.2	
	N	23	25.6	
	DA	09	10.0	
Education develops the communication skills among women through distance mode of education.	SDA	02	2.2	2.25
	SA	30	33.3	
	A	27	30.0	
	N	20	22.2	
	DA	14	6.7	
	SDA	07	7.8	

Table 2 depicts that 23.3% tutors strongly agreed, 32.3% tutors agreed, 30.0% tutors were neutral, and 14.4% tutors disagreed while 0.0% tutors strongly disagreed to the statement that distance education has encouraging impact on women attitudes hence, its mean score was 2.35. On the other hand, 22.2% tutors strongly agreed, 31.1% tutors agreed, 26.7% tutors were neutral, 14.4% tutors disagreed and 5.6% tutors strongly disagreed to the statement that distance education is helping women regarding social adjustment in the society and its mean score was 2.50. Similarly, 30.0% tutors strongly agreed, 32.2% tutors agreed, 25.6% tutors neutral, 10.0% tutors disagreed and 2.2% tutors strongly disagreed to the statement that the education is promoting punctuality in women through distance mode of education however, its mean score was 2.22. Lastly, it is found that, 33.3% tutors were strongly agreed, 30.0% tutors agreed, 22.2% tutors neutral, 6.7% tutors disagreed 7.8% tutors strongly disagreed to the statement that education develops the communication skills among women through distance mode of education and its mean score was

2.25.

#### **4. Conclusions**

The study focused on different aspects of the distance education which according to opinions of the respondents, significantly contributed towards improving access of women to education, building their skills and confidence and helping them understand and participate in the making of the society in general.

The study shows that a large number of the respondents were positive that distance education promotes communication skills, social awareness and self-awareness in women which help them to play their role in society and family. The skills improvement help these women to create space for them in the family and society. This delivers social and economic purpose of education.

The results show that most of the students have a positive attitude that distance education is enhancing the quality of self-esteem as well as self-reliance among women. This addresses the deep rooted problem of social exclusion and discrimination to bring a positive change in terms of women empowerment.

The results of data presented that most of the respondents have a positive attitude regarding the idea of distance education developing social skills, learning skills and computer skills among women. These are the practical competencies required by every individual to positively contribute in the society.

The results of the study also show that education develops the quality of decision-making and self-confidence among women. It builds the understanding of the problems and issues. Also, it enhances the skills of decision making.

Based on the above, it is very clear that the education through any means actually makes a major difference in the knowledge, attitude and practices of women which in the long run will transform the society.

#### **5. Recommendations**

1. It is recommended that the number of female educational institutions in formal system of education should be equal in number to the institutions for males to decrease gender gap in Pakistan. The women with enhanced opportunities will be able to make a significant difference in economic and societal terms.

2. The quality and relevance of distance learning institutions in Pakistan may be improved using better frameworks and adopting latest technologies and approaches based on global and regional experiences. Currently, there are very few institutions in public and private sectors which need to be strengthened and supported.
3. The outreach of these distance learning institutions may be increased and they may be modernized instead of conventional regional outfits at provincial level. This will minimize the gender gap of education in Pakistan.
4. The regulatory framework under a proper policy is required to be designed and rolled out. The institutions may make efforts to learn and benefit from global experiences. It is further recommended that proper learning management system should be used to implement and monitor distance and open educational programs. It is also recommended that distance education should apply using a proper strategy to benefit from the global online resources and courses.

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