

Assessment of Empowering Women through ODL Model in Selected Districts of Assam

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Abstract

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has opened new avenues for educating & empowering women, to make them empowered with flexibility. Empowerment is multi-dimensional process to enhance a group or individuals status in the society and participation. It provides greater autonomy in the decision-making process at home and in society. A study is undertaken with the objectives to assess the factors responsible for the transfer of knowledge and the level of empowerment attained by women through ODL mode among women. The sample consisted of 520 women both from rural and urban areas. The study revealed that in ODL mode women learners perceived the change after studying and they are able to earn more. The reason for studying through ODL mode is to improve individual social status both in urban and in rural areas. Found that women are strongly in favour of Open Distance Learning system and only difference observable is with respect to cost effectiveness and, creation of awareness among the rural women. Women from rural areas possess psycho fear concerning cultural and religious matters; socio-economic and cultural environment; economic matters; educational heritage; and, shortage of educational institutions. The overall level of success of women through distance mode of learning happened to be 81%.

Key words: Empowerment, ODL, Rural and urban areas, Women community.

1.0 Introduction

Women all over the world are challenged by a number of obstacles that restrict their ability to play significant roles in their communities and the broader society. The most urgent priority is to ensure access to and improve the quality of learning, particularly the education of the women community so that the obstacles in the way of empowerment of weaker sections may be removed at any

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cost. The issue of the status of women in society has been debated much since the observance of the 'International Decade for Women' (1975-1980). Even after so many years the real situation of women all around the world is yet to be improved 70 percent of the 1.3 billion people who live in absolute poverty around the globe, are women. They work two-thirds of world's working hours, but earn only 10 percent of the world's income and own less than 1 percent of the world's property (Mahtab, 2007). According to Mohiuddin (1995), women's lower status is manifested in women's low wage rates than men in all occupational fields and industries, in their limited upward mobility, and in their greater family responsibilities due to divorce, abandonment, etc. in the developed countries. The status of women in the developing countries is lower with respect to their work being underpaid, unrecognized, limited access to productive resources and support services such as health and education. Globally, one in every three women is subjected to violence during her life time. Renana Jhabvala puts it "Women often remain invisible and unrecognized as workers, both because they are women and because work in the informal economy is often hidden. The work and contributions of women to the economy, as well as in the family and community, are persistently undervalued, particularly when women are home-based workers, paid domestic or care workers, or unpaid contributing workers in family businesses or on family farms. Focusing on their role as workers rather than homemakers or childcare providers serves to underscore the fact that women are economic agents who contribute to their households and the economy and therefore should be considered a target of economic as well as social policies". Indian women are also victims of social discrimination and have a low status within the family. The logic behind such discrimination is such that girls appear as a liability for the family as they have to be married off, often with huge dowry, whereas boys are considered an asset as it is believed that they carry on the family lineage and support the family in times of financial needs and bring in dowry (Human Development in South Asia, 2000). The issue of women empowerment is a global concern and the United Nations (UN) has included gender equality and women empowerment in its development goals. The first step for the women empowerment is to enhance their literacy level and uplift their economic solvency. The relevance of understanding socio-culturally embedded roots of gendered relations is rightly put forward by Freire (1996), the awareness of alternatives to gendered cultural norms,

communication processes and knowledge transfer can strengthen the concept of power towards empowerment. Women contribute to their families, societies and countries in a number of ways, alongwith financially. This brings development in the economy. Women must participate in decision making processes. Women should be provided with the skills, knowledge, and access to resources.

India still has a patriarchal society in which cultural bias against women has contributed to frequent cases of female infanticide, particularly in poor and rural areas. To attain the status of a developed country, India must transform its huge women force into an effective human resource and this is possible only through the empowerment of women. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic, educational and political problems faced by them. Some of the legislations enacted for uplifting the status of women are in the form of Articles 14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 23, 39, 42, 51A, 243D. The Government of India has various welfare schemes and policies, both at State and Central levels for the empowerment of woman, such as Swadhar (1995), Swayam Siddha (2001), Support to Training and Employment Programme for Women (STEP-2003), Sabla Scheme (2010), National Mission for Empowerment of Women (2010), Mahila vikas Nidhi, Priyadarshini yojana, trade-related entrepreneurship assistance and development (TREAD), Special programs conducted by the SIDO (Small Industries Development Organization), (CWEIF) the Consortium of Women Entrepreneurs of India, WIT (Women India Trust), income generating schemes by Department of Women and Child Development, KVIC (Khadi Villages Industries Commission), DIC (District Industrial Centers), women cell, Women Industries Fund Schemes, etc. These policies and programmes aim at social, economic and educational empowerment of women.

Conceptually, empowerment is multi-dimensional and can be described as a process wherein a group or individuals are able to enhance their status in the society on one hand and overall participation and growth on the other. Empowerment is an active multi-dimensional process which enables women to realize their identity, position, and power in all spheres of life. Empowerment provides greater autonomy in the decision-making process at home and in the matters concerning society and freedom from customs, beliefs, and practices.

With the emergence of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) for educating & empowering women, new avenues have come to the fore to make women empowered with flexible access to education. There is a need for exploring the transfer of knowledge through the ODL mode and equipping the women of Assam (for example) with the power of empowerment. Though the society in the state of Assam depicts a patriarchal system, women hold more or less a respectful status. It needs to be explored to what extent the non formal education has brought in changes in different forms. ODL system of education has been able to attract and accelerate the rate of enrolment of women in various courses of study.

2.0 Objective of the Study

- (1) To assess the factors responsible for the transfer of knowledge through ODL mode among women
- (2) To assess the level of empowerment attained by women through distance mode of learning

3.0 Methodology

Descriptive Survey Method has been adopted based on necessary data and information relevant to the study.

3.1 Population of the study

Population for the study comprised of those women who have passed any type of course in the distance education mode, hailing from four districts of Assam, viz., Hojai, Kamrup (Metro), Kamrup, and Lakhimpur.

3.2 Tool

In the present study, schedule has been prepared consisting of 43 number of items, to collect the information from selected target group.

3.3 Procedure of Data Collection

Required information has been collected by the investigator from the sample learners and analysis has been carried out following suitable statistical analysis.

3.4 Sample

The sample of 520 women drawn for the present study belongs to both rural and urban areas, and their distribution in different districts has been shown in Table 1.

Table 1 District wise distribution of women respondents

District	Number of Respondents		
	Urban	Rural	Total
Hojai	68	48	116 (22.3)
Kamrup	80	60	140 (26.9)
Kamrup (M)	113	80	193 (37.1)
Lakhimpur	42	29	71 (13.6)
Total	303 (58.3)	217 (41.7)	520

N.B. : Figures in bracket are in percentages

4.0 Analysis of Data

4.1 General Information on women respondents

A brief description on women respondents has been presented in Table 2 under different headings.

(a) District wise distribution: More than 57 percent of the respondents hail from urban areas and the remaining from rural areas as shown in Table 2. The number of respondents from urban areas of Hojai, Kamrup, Kamrup (M) and Lakhimpur are around 22 percent, 27 percent, 32 percent and 18 percent respectively, and in rural areas of the district 21 percent, 27 percent, 36 percent, and 16 percent respectively.

Table 2 Information about women respondents

Particulars	Number of Respondents		
	Urban	Rural	Total
Hojai	68	48	116 (22.3)
Kamrup	80	60	140 (26.9)
Kamrup (M)	113	80	193 (37.1)
Lakhimpur	42	29	71 (13.6)
IDOL (under Gauhati Univ.)	74	52	126 (24.2)

IGNOU	106	78	184 (35.4)
KKHSOU	123	87	210 (40.4)
Age			
20-24	62	56	118(22.7)
25-29	72	61	133(25.6)
30-34	80	52	132(25.4)
35-39	89	48	137(26.3)
Marital Status			
Married	184	159	343 (65.6)
Unmarried	119	58	197 (34.4)
Educational level			
Certificate	68	48	116(22.3)
Diploma	80	60	140(26.9)
Degree	113	80	193(37.1)
Post Graduate	42	29	71(13.7)

N.B. : Figures in bracket are in percentages

(b) Distance Education Institution: In the present study more than 39 percent of the women respondents studied from KKHSOU, 36 percent from IGNOU and the remaining 24 percent from IDOL (under Gauhati University). Out of 520 women respondents 57 percent were from urban area and around 43 percent were from rural area.

(c) Age Level: Majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of 25-29 years for both rural and urban areas. Respective age level of respondents happens to be 23.8 percent for 20-24 years, 27 percent for 25-29 years, 25 percent for 30-34 years and 24.2 percent for 35-39 years.

(d) Marital Status: Maximum (62 percent) number of respondents were found to be married. In urban area the married respondents is around 60 percent and is around 40 percent were unmarried. Similarly, in rural areas, the married respondents were approximately 65 percent and unmarried 35 percent.

(e) Educational qualification: Educational qualification of the respondents under consideration were Certificate, Diploma, Graduation or Post graduation courses. Around 24 percent were Certificate holders, 26 percent Diploma holders, 28 percent were Graduates and 22 percent were Post graduates.

4.2 Factors responsible for Transfer of Knowledge

(a) Person inspired to study through distance mode: Both in the urban and rural areas it has been found that 30 percent of the women respondents in each were are inspired by their mothers to study through distance mode. From Table 3 it is well evidenced that family members and friends are the persons responsible for inspiring the women to educate.

Table 3 Source of inspiration for the education of women

Persons	Area	Frequency	Percent
Father	Urban	37	12.2
	Rural	22	10.1
Mother	Urban	92	30.4
	Rural	65	30.0
Husband	Urban	0	0
	Rural	2	0.9
Sister/Brother	Urban	22	7.3
	Rural	14	6.5
Self	Urban	54	17.8
	Rural	40	18.4
Friend	Urban	13	4.3
	Rural	6	2.8
Other	Urban	85	28.1
	Rural	68	31.3

(b) Modes of study: In case of urban area, 53 percent of the respondents studied with the assistance of family members whereas, in rural area, it was more than 62 percent. More than 20 percent of the respondents both in urban and rural areas studied by self or by taking tuition, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Mode of studying

Mode	Area	Frequency	Percent
Self study	Urban	74	24.6
	Rural	42	19.4
Tuition	Urban	68	22.4
	Rural	39	18.0
Family Members	Urban	161	53.1
	Rural	136	62.6

(c) Reason for studying: More than 14 percent of the respondents from both urban and rural areas expressed their reason for studying to be the expectation of better job opportunities. On the other hand, more than 28 percent of urban respondents and 30 percent of rural respondents stated that their reason was to gain knowledge. Responses obtained from women with respect to the reason for selection of study through ODL mode is to improve individual social status both in urban (31 percent) and in rural (33 percent) areas have been presented in Table 5. The next highest reason found is to gain knowledge.

Table 5 Reason for study

Purpose of Study	Area	Frequency	Percent
Better job opportunities	Urban	45	14.9
	Rural	31	14.3
Improving social status	Urban	101	33.3
	Rural	70	32.3
Time pass	Urban	20	6.6
	Rural	24	11.1
Gain knowledge	Urban	86	28.4
	Rural	67	30.9
Purpose of promotion in job	Urban	51	16.8
	Rural	25	11.5
Did not get chance to study	Urban	0	0
	Rural	0	0

(d) Changes observed after studying through distance mode: A variety of responses obtained from the respondents reveal that majority of the women respondents were able to earn more and to get suitable job according to their likings, after the completion of the respective course. It has been found that more than 54 percent of urban and 56 percent of rural area (vide Table 6) respondents perceived the change. All the respondents expressed one or the other changes being observed after studying through distance mode.

Table 6 Changes observed after studying through distance mode

Changes observed	Area	Frequency	Percent
People treat me differently	Urban	45	14.9
	Rural	32	14.7
Able to get suitable job	Urban	83	27.4
	Rural	57	26.3
Able to earn more	Urban	90	29.7
	Rural	68	31.3
Able to expand work life	Urban	31	10.2
	Rural	19	8.8
Able to expand social circle	Urban	26	8.6
	Rural	28	12.9
Able to attain more status in society	Urban	28	9.2
	Rural	13	6.0
No change	Urban	0	0
	Rural	0	0

4.3 *Assessment of level of empowerment attained by women through distance mode of learning*

From Table 7, it can be observed that:

- (a) For ODL dimension, women offer more importance in rural areas to the two pairs and in urban areas to nil pair of varying variables.
- (b) For Environmental dimension, in rural areas women offer more importance to the eight pairs, whereas in urban areas to six pairs of varying variables.
- (c) For Parental dimension, rural women offer more importance to seventeen pairs, whereas in urban areas to equal number of pairs of varying variables.

There are certain positive correlation pair of variables which are common both in urban and rural areas, which have not been highlighted here.

Table 7 Positive correlation pair of variables distinct in urban and rural areas.

Dimensions					
ODL		Environmental		Parental	
Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
	Training-Lack	Socio-Psycho	Socio-Economic	Bear-Feel	Bear-Illiterate
	Objective-Awareness	Heritage-Perception	Socio-Colleges	Bear-Decision	Bear Face
		Research-Economic	Political-Taboos	Bear-Attitude	Illiterate-Importance
		Research-College	Political-Psycho	Illiterate-Face	Illiterate-Attitude
		Shortage-Norms	Economic-Taboos	Maintain-Encourage	Maintain-Decision
		Shortage-Perception	Economic-Psycho	Maintain-Feel	Maintain-Early
			Taboos-Perception	Encourage-Feel	Maintain- Support
			Psycho-Norms	Ignorance-Early	Maintain-Interested
				Ignorance-Importance	Encourage-Face
				Face-Decision	Encourage-Early
				Face-Attitude	Ignorance-Believe
				Believe-Early	Ignorance-Tendency
				Believe-Importance	Face-Tendency
				Believe-Interested	Face-Early
				Tendency-Neglect	Face-Neglect
				Early-Neglect	Believe-Feel
				Early-Interested	Early-Decision

The mean score of women respondents has been found to be in the order of highest to lowest for the dimensions: Parental>Environment>ODL.

We can perceive that parental dimension merits first priority followed by environment and ODL. For the distance mode of learning, the Mean and SD are shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Mean and SD for the statements

Dimension	Mean	Std. Deviation
ODL	10.77	.924
Environment	18.95	1.801
Parental	28.33	2.126
Distance mode of learning (ODL + Environment + Parental)	58.05	3.353

Finally, it has been found that there existed a significant correlation among the dimensions ODL-Environment, Environment-Parental, as shown in the correlation Table 9.

Table 9 Correlation with respect to distance mode of learning

Dimension		ODL	Environ	Parental	Combined
ODL	Pearson Correlation	1	.207**	-.031	.367**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.477	.000
	N	520	520	520	520
Environment	Pearson Correlation	.207**	1	.269**	.765**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	520	520	520	520
Parental	Pearson Correlation	-.031	.269**	1	.770**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.477	.000		.000
	N	520	520	520	520
Distance mode of learning (Combined)	Pearson Correlation	.367**	.765**	.770**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	520	520	520	520

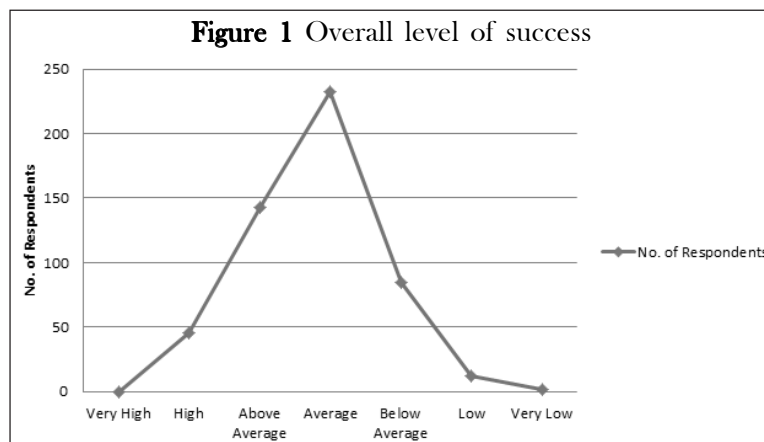
N.B.: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Nearly 9 percent of the respondents have been found to have achieved high (around 27 percent) above average and around 45 percent average level of success. Thus, it is clear that the overall level of success of women who studied through distance mode of learning is 81 percent.

Table 10 Overall level of success achieved by women through distance mode of learning

Range of Z scores	Level of Success	No. of Respondents	Percent
+2.46 & above	Very High	0	0
+2.46 to +1.38	High	46	8.8
+1.37 to +0.29	Above Average	143	27.5
+0.28 to -0.80	Average	232	44.6
-0.81 to -1.89	Below Average	85	16.3
-1.90 to -2.98	Low	12	2.3
-2.99 & below	Very Low	2	0.4
Total		520	

Figure 1 presents the overall level of success achieved by women through distance mode of learning.



Thus, it is evident that the perception of respondents' level of success is on the positive side, indicating that women respondents are able to perceive the ODL, environmental and parental dimensions well and there exists a strong correlation among the dimensions. There are similarities among the urban and rural women respondents on several variables of the dimensions and at the same time there are certain distinct differences between urban and rural areas. The reasons for differences are due to social, political, economic and educational outlook of the women respondents.

5.0 Findings of the Study

- (a) It is evident that the prime source of inspiration for the education of women happens to be their family members and friends.
- (b) In both the rural and urban areas, 50 percent of the women folks studied with the assistance of family members and more than 20 percent of the women studied by self or by taking tuition.
- (c) The reason for selection of study through ODL mode is to improve individual social status as opined by women respondents in urban (31 percent) and in rural (33 percent) areas. To gain knowledge is another reason expressed by around 28 percent from urban and 30 percent from rural women.
- (d) More than 54 percent respondents from urban and 56 percent from rural areas perceived the change after studying through distance mode, in the form of earning more and the ability to get a suitable job.
- (e) In the case of distance education mode, there exists a significant correlation among the dimensions ODL - Environment, Environment - Parental.
- (f) Nearly 9 percent of the respondents have been found to have achieved high, around 27 percent above average and around 45 percent average level of success. The overall level of success of women who studied through distance mode of learning is 81 percent.

6.0 Discussion

The study revealed that in the ODL mode of education, women learners experienced the positive change after the completion of course and they were able to earn more and get suitable job. It has been found that a prime reason for studying through the ODL mode was to improve individual social status. Mention needs to be made that the age of the woman has a relation with her mobility which means that as a woman gets older, she acquires more mobility due to the changing roles in relation to age. She is required to shoulder the responsibility of looking after the family and household tasks either as a daughter, wife or mother, and at that point of time the feeling for the need for education seems to arise. The study reveals that women from both the urban and rural areas are strongly in favour of Open and Distance Learning system and the only difference

observable is with respect to cost effectiveness and creation of awareness among the rural women. Social, cultural and religious factors are found to be actual reasons for slowing down the pace of women empowerment. Thus, it can be said that empowerment is one of the key factors in determining the development in the status and position of women in the society. Women are found to be well aware of the fact that education is the key to uplift their status in the society but due to prevailing traditional systems, the actual benefit of empowerment is not achieved as per desired expectation.

However, one thing that needs to be pondered over, as has been found in this study, is that most women from rural areas possess psycho fear concerning cultural and religious matters, socio-economic and cultural environment, economic matters, educational heritage and shortage of educational institutions compared to the urban counterparts. The overall level of success of women studied through distance mode of learning both in rural and urban areas happens to be 81 percent.

7.0 Conclusion

Transformation is very much needed, with the consideration that its pace may be less than what is desired. Women should be educationally aware to be able to maintain their livelihood. Thus, it can be perceived that if women's empowerment is to be effected, it can be made possible only through the medium of education. Hence, it is of foremost importance to raise the level of education amongst women. The present study suggests that ODL is a promising and practical means to pave way to widen access to education, thereby increasing the participation of women in education which will definitely improve their economic, social, political and cultural status in the society and encourage them to become self-reliant.

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