



Impact of ODL on Women's lives – A case on the women students of Commerce, KKHSOU.

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Abstract:

This research paper delves into the transformative impact of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) on the lives of women, specifically focusing on female students pursuing commerce courses at Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU). The study explores the multifaceted dimensions of ODL and its influence on women's educational pursuits, career aspirations, and overall empowerment. Through a comprehensive examination of the experiences and perspectives of women enrolled in commerce programs at KKHSOU, this paper aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which ODL contributes to breaking barriers and fostering positive socio-economic changes in the lives of female learners. The findings of this research provide valuable insights into the role of ODL in promoting gender inclusivity and enhancing the educational landscape for women in the context of commerce education.

Keywords: Open and Distance Learning (ODL), women's education, commerce students, KKHSOU, gender inclusivity, empowerment, socio-economic impact, transformative learning, educational barriers, career aspirations.

Introduction:

Open and Distance Learning (ODL) has emerged as a transformative force reshaping educational landscapes worldwide, offering flexible and accessible opportunities for learners (Daniel, 2015). This study delves into the nuanced exploration of ODL's impact on the lives of women, particularly those enrolled in commerce programs at Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU). This research is the endeavor to

unravel the intricate dynamics through which ODL contributes to breaking educational barriers and fostering positive changes in the lives of female students.

As the demand for flexible and inclusive educational models continues to grow, ODL has become indispensable, particularly for women seeking higher education (UNESCO, 2017). This paper synthesizes the experiences and perspectives of women engaged in commerce courses at KKHSOU, aiming to uncover how ODL influences their educational trajectories, career aspirations, and overall empowerment. Grounded in the belief that understanding these dynamics is pivotal for fostering more inclusive and equitable educational environments, this study seeks to shed light on the transformative potential of ODL for women in commerce education.

Literature Review:

1. **Gender Disparities in Traditional Education:** Traditional educational systems have long been plagued by gender disparities, with women encountering obstacles such as limited access, societal expectations, and stereotyping (Archer, 2007; UNESCO, 2017). These challenges underscore the imperative for alternative educational models capable of addressing and alleviating these disparities.
2. **Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as an Inclusive Educational Approach:** Scholars have underscored the potential of ODL in fostering inclusivity through its provision of flexible learning opportunities (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). ODL is recognized for its capacity to surmount geographical constraints, enabling learners, particularly women, to access education remotely and on their own terms (Daniel, 2015). While existing literature highlights these advantages, further exploration within the context of commerce education, especially in open universities like KKHSOU, would deepen our understanding of ODL's efficacy in addressing gender disparities.
3. **Impact of ODL on Women's Empowerment:** Literature attests to the positive influence of ODL on women's empowerment, citing its role in bolstering confidence, fostering independence, and enhancing decision-making abilities (Rumble, 2001; Quayyum, 2017). Studies have also delved into ODL's contribution to elevating women's socio-economic status and dismantling traditional gender roles (Gulati & Dutta, 2018). However, further examination within the context of commerce education, particularly at institutions like KKHSOU, would provide valuable insights into the nuanced ways in which ODL empowers women in this field.
4. **Commerce Education and Career Opportunities for Women:** Within the broader educational landscape, research has scrutinized the specific challenges and opportunities confronting women in commerce education. Gender biases in career selection, wage differentials, and underrepresentation in leadership roles have

been documented (Kabeer, 2005; Levanon, England, & Allison, 2009). An exploration of these dynamics within the realm of ODL and commerce education, particularly at institutions like KKHSOU, would enhance our understanding of the impact of ODL on women's career trajectories and opportunities for advancement.

Several case studies have explored the impact of ODL on various demographic groups, providing insights into the experiences of learners. While some studies focus on overall outcomes, there is a gap in the literature regarding the specific experiences of women in commerce programs at open universities like KKHSOU. In synthesizing these strands of literature, this paper aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing a detailed examination of how ODL influences the lives of women pursuing commerce education at KKHSOU, shedding light on both the challenges and opportunities presented by this innovative educational approach.

Objectives:

1. Understand the factors influencing their decision to pursue commerce education through ODL.
2. Investigate the socio-economic impact of ODL on women's lives, specifically focusing on financial independence, decision-making autonomy, and contributions to the family and community.

Research queries:

1. What factors influence individuals' decisions to pursue commerce education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs?
2. How does the socio-economic status of individuals affect their inclination towards ODL for commerce education, considering aspects like income levels, employment status, and geographic location?

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to gain in-depth insights into the experiences and perspectives of women enrolled in commerce programs at Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University (KKHSOU). Qualitative methods are chosen for their ability to facilitate a detailed exploration of individuals' lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions, which is particularly relevant for understanding the nuanced impact of Open and Distance Learning (ODL) on women's lives.

The participants for this study were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Inclusion criteria included women enrolled in commerce courses at KKHSOU through ODL, varying in age, socio-economic status, geographic location, and educational background. A total of 15 participants were recruited for interviews, ensuring saturation of themes and perspectives. Inclusion criteria for the participants stipulated that they must be female students currently pursuing commerce education through ODL at KKHSOU, and efforts were made to include participants from different stages of their educational journey to capture varied experiences.

Data collection primarily involved semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to articulate their experiences, motivations, and perceptions regarding ODL and commerce education. Interviews were conducted in person and via video conferencing platforms, depending on participants' preferences and logistical considerations.

Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data obtained from interviews. This approach involves systematically coding and categorizing the data to identify recurring themes and patterns. The analysis was iterative, with constant comparison of emerging themes against the research objectives and theoretical frameworks. Through this process, key insights regarding the impact of ODL on women's lives in the context of commerce education were identified.

Findings:

The findings of this study unveil the multifaceted factors influencing women's decision to pursue commerce education through Open and Distance Learning (ODL) programs at KKHSOU. Flexibility emerged as a paramount motivator, enabling women to effectively balance educational pursuits with familial responsibilities, employment, and other commitments. Participants highlighted the convenience of ODL, particularly its time flexibility and accessibility, which proved invaluable for those residing in rural areas or facing mobility constraints. Additionally, the desire for personal and professional growth, alongside aspirations for financial independence, emerged as key drivers for enrolling in commerce courses through ODL.

The study underscores the substantial socio-economic impact of ODL on women enrolled in commerce programs at KKHSOU. Participants reported heightened financial independence and empowerment resulting from their educational endeavors through ODL. By acquiring relevant skills and qualifications, participants experienced enhanced employment opportunities and income-generating activities. Moreover, several participants emphasized how commerce education through ODL empowered them to contribute to their family's financial stability and invest in their children's education.

Furthermore, ODL was perceived as a catalyst for decision-making autonomy, fostering confidence and agency in managing personal and professional lives.

Challenges and Barriers: Despite the transformative benefits, participants also identified several challenges associated with ODL and commerce education. Technical difficulties, such as internet connectivity issues and limited access to digital resources, posed significant barriers, particularly for women in remote areas. Balancing academic demands with household responsibilities necessitated effective time management and support from family members. Additionally, concerns regarding the perceived value of ODL qualifications in the job market and the lack of networking opportunities compared to traditional institutions were expressed by some participants.

Career Aspirations and Future Prospects: The study findings reveal diverse career aspirations among women enrolled in commerce programs through ODL at KKHSOU. While some participants aimed for traditional career paths in accounting, finance, or entrepreneurship, others expressed interest in leveraging their skills for social impact initiatives or community development projects. ODL was perceived as a facilitator for career advancement and professional growth, enabling women to explore new opportunities and transcend traditional gender roles. Continuous learning and skill development were emphasized by several participants as essential for remaining competitive in the evolving job market.

Discussion and Implications:

While the findings offer rich insights, further elaboration with direct quotes from participants would enhance authenticity and depth. Incorporating excerpts from interviews can facilitate a closer connection between readers and participants' experiences.

Moreover, a deeper discussion of how the findings contribute to existing literature, addressing any unexpected or contradictory findings, and outlining practical implications for policy and practice would enrich the discussion section. Explicit acknowledgment of limitations and their potential influence on findings and interpretations would enhance transparency and encourage future research to address gaps or methodological challenges.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study highlights the transformative impact of ODL on women's lives, particularly in the context of commerce education. ODL emerges as a powerful tool for enhancing gender inclusivity, empowering women, and fostering socio-economic advancement. However, attention to challenges such as technical barriers and balancing

multiple responsibilities is imperative to ensure the continued success and accessibility of ODL programs for women learners. Encouraging future research to explore these nuances further and offering suggestions for future research directions would reinforce the significance of this study.

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