GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION THROUGH INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AND OTHER MODES OF DISTANCE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Equal access to good quality education requires addressing wide-ranging and persistent inequalities in society and should include a stronger focus on how different forms of inequality intersect to produce unequal outcomes for marginalized and vulnerable groups. Equity in education also implies various proactive and targeted measures to offer progressive support to disadvantaged groups. Education plays a vital role in changing the thinking of the people and to change the outlook and perspectives also. This paper deals with Gender equality and how equal access can be offered through Information and Communication Technology and other modes of Distance learning. This paper describes how various modes are changing people's life and how education isimparted without walls and how these modes of education are changing the perspective of Gender equality and Equal access towards Education.

Keywords : ICT, Educomp, Mainstreaming,Virtual.

Education is very important tool for everyone to succeed in life and get something different. It helps a lot in lessening the challenges of life difficult life.Knowledge gained throughout the education period enables each and every individual confident about their life. It opens various doors to the opportunities of achieving better prospects in life so promotes career growth. Many awareness programmes has been run by the government in enhance the value of education in rural areas. It brings feeling of equality among all people in the society and promotes growth and development of the country.Education plays a paramount role in the modern technological world. Now-a-days, there are many ways to enhance the education level. The whole criteria of education have been changed now. We can study through the distance learning programmes after the 12th standard together with the job. Education is not so costly, anyone one with less money may study continuously. We can get admission in the big and popular universities with fewer fees through the distance learning. Other small training institutes are providing education to enhance the skill level in particular field.Education is must for both men and women equally as both together make a healthy and educated society. It is an essential tool for getting bright future as well as plays a most important role in the development and progress of the country. Citizens of the country become responsible for the better future and development of the country. Highly educated people become the base of the developed country. So, proper education makes the bright future of both, the individual and the country. It is only educated leaders who build the nation and lead it to the height of success and progress. Education makes people as perfect and noble as possible.

Good education gives many purposes to the life such as enhancement of the personal advancement, increase social status, increase social health, economical progress, success to the nation, set goals of life, make us aware towards many social issues and gives solutions to solve environmental

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problems and other related issues. Now-a-days, education has become verysimple and easy because of the implementation of distance learning programmes. Modern education system is fully capable to remove the social issues of illiteracy and inequality among people of different race, religion and caste. Education develops the people's minds to a great level and helps in removing all the differences in the society. It makes us able to become a good learner and understand every aspect on life. It provides ability to understand all the human rights, social rights, duties and responsibilities towards country.

Multiple dimensions of gender equality in Education:
There are four main dimensions of gender equality
* Equality of access,
* Equality in the learning process,
* Equality of educational outcomes, and
* Equality of external results (Subrahmanian n.d.).

Below are brief descriptions of each dimension.

EQUALITY OF ACCESS

Equality of access means that girls and boys are offered equitable opportunities to gain admission to formal, non-formal, or alternative approaches to basic education. Actual attendance, rather than enrollment, is a better indicator of whether access has been achieved.

EQUALITY IN THE LEARNING PROCESS

Equality in the learning process means that girls and boys receive equitable treatment and attention and have equal opportunities to learn. This means that girls and boys are exposed to the same curricula, although the coursework may be taught differently to accommodate the different learning styles of girls and boys. Equality in the learning process also means that all learners should be exposed to teaching methods and materials that are free of stereotypes and gender bias. In addition, it means that boys and girls should have the freedom to learn, explore, and develop skills in all academic and extracurricular offerings.

EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Equality of educational outcomes means that girls and boys enjoy equal opportunities to achieve and outcomes are based on their individual talents and efforts. To ensure fair chances for achievement, the length of school careers, academic qualifications, and diplomas should not differ based on a person's sex. Mechanisms for evaluating individual achievement should also be free of any gender bias. What tests, examinations, and assessments measure tells students what matters and to the extent that these mechanisms reflect a gender bias, they transmit messages to students that can discourage their interest in school or in particular subjects. Results from classroom tests, national examinations, and international assessments can influence boys' and girls' confidence levels and their perceptions of their abilities and what is expected of them. They can also impact what is taught in the classroom and how content is delivered. Where tests or examinations are used to determine promotion into future grades, or other types of educational opportunities, the extent to which there may be bias in these mechanisms is an important consideration when trying to ensure equality of access and equality of outcomes.

EQUALITY OF EXTERNAL RESULTS

Equality of external results occurs when the status of men and women, their access to goods and resources, and their ability to contribute to, participate in, and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political activities are equal. This implies that career opportunities, the time needed to secure employment after leaving full-time education, and the earnings of men and women with similar qualifications and experience are equal.

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EDUCATION THROUGH INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

"ICTs stand for information and communication technologies and are defined, for the purposes of this primer, as a "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information."(Wikipedia)

ICT is an extended term for information technology (IT) which stresses the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunications (telephone lines and wireless signals) as well as necessary enterprise software, middleware, storage and audio visual systems which enable users to access, store, transmit and manipulate information. (Wikipedia.org/ICT)

ICT has also been used as the powerful tool for the interaction to the world. ICT includes the range of hardware and software devices and programs such as personal computers, assistive technologies, scanners, digital cameras, multimedia programs, and image editing software, spreadsheet and database programs. ICT includes communication technologies such as computers, video chats and video conferencing. Today in every field it may be banking, business, medical and most important education etc. The literacy of ICT has become very important for people's work, social and personal lives. ICT includes the range of hardware and software devices and programs such as personal computers, assistive technologies, scanners, digital cameras, multimedia programs, image editing software, spreadsheets and database programs. It includes the communication technologies such as computer, video chat and video conferencing.

Internet nowadays playing the most important role in our life. On our smartphones the internet lets you connect to the world and the most important factor which internet is playing is that it provides each and every type of information on your fingertips whether it may be of any area of the world or continent.

IMPACT OF ICT IN EDUCATION:

In the field of education the use of ICT is also a very important factor. While teaching learning process the auditory and visual presence of a student is very important. Through the use of this ICT we create an interest in the students towards learning. ICT makes learning more interesting and joyful. Many schools have inherited the e learning system. Many of the schools have the educomp classes which are called digital classes. In the field of education ICT has changed the method of learning. ICT use in teaching makes teaching learning process more interesting. We all know studying anything visually helps us to remember it for a long term than traditional method of teaching. By the use of ICT teachers can teach the chapter easily and make teaching learning process joyful. The concept of smart classes is based on the same. But in some areas smart classes are adopted because teachers are incompetent of teaching with the help of ICT.

Information and Communication Technologies comprise a complex and heterogeneous set of goods, applications and services used to produce, process, distribute and transform information. The ICT sector consists of segments as diverse as telecommunications, television and radio broadcasting, computer hardware, software and services and electronic media (for example, the Internet and electronic mail). Information and communication needs can be met by more traditional means, such as print media and fixed telephone lines, or by satellite technology, mobile phonesand the Internet. Traditional technologies continue to be important for large numbers of people around the world, particularly in rural areas. However, new technologies have a vast potential for empowerment which needs to be fully exploited. The term ICT has been used to encompass technological innovation and convergence in information and communication leading to the development of so-called information or knowledge societies, with resulting changes in social interaction, economic and business practices, political engagement, education, health, leisure and entertainment. Over the past decade, there has been a growing understanding that these technologies can be powerful instruments for advancing economic

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and social development through the creation of new types of economic activity, employment opportunities, improvements in health-care delivery and other services, and the enhancement of networking, participation and advocacy within society. ICT also have the potential to improve interaction between Governments and citizens, fostering transparency and accountability in governance.

By the use of ICT:-

E-learning gets real

Bringing the world closer

Presenting creative options

A good source of knowledge

MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION THROUGH INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

While there is recognition of the potential of ICT as a tool for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, a "gender divide" has also been identified, reflected in the lower numbers of women accessing and using ICT compared with men. Unless this genderdivide is specifically addressed, there is a risk that ICT may exacerbate existing inequalities between women and men and create new forms of inequality. If, however, the gender dimensions of ICT—in terms of access and use, capacity-building opportunities, employment and potential for empowerment—are explicitly identified and addressed, ICT can be a powerful catalyst for political and social empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equalityTechnologies are socially constructed and thus have different impacts on women and men.46 Women's capacity to exploit the potential of the new ICT as tools for empowerment is constrained in different ways. Some constraints are linked to factors that affect both women and men, including technical infrastructure, connection costs, computer literacy and language skills. These overall constraints are, however, exacerbated in many cases by gender-based determinants which particularly disadvantage women.Women need ICT for the same reasons as men; to access information of importance to their productive, reproductive and community roles and to obtain additional resources. Access to ICT can enable women and men to gain a stronger voice in their communities, their Government and at the global level. ICT also offers women flexibility in time and space and can be of particular value to women who face social isolation, including many women in developing countries.

OBJECTIVES OF GENDER EQUALITY AND EQUAL ACCESS THROUGH DIFFERENT MODES OF EDUCATION

- Mainstreaming and monitoring of a gender perspective in all ICT initiatives.
- Equal Access can be monitored in respect of gender.
- Collecting sex disaggregated data on the use of ICT and women's participation in policy-making as well as developing targets, indicators and benchmarks to track the progress of women's and girl's access to the benefits of ICT.
- Identifying and promoting good practices and lessons learned on the ways women and girls are using ICT.
- Capacity-building towards gender equality in education and employment.
- Enhancing democracy and women's participation through electronic connectivity
- Developing research and policies on health and environmental hazards of ICT industries.

DIFFERENT MODES OF DISTANCE LEARNING:
EDUCATION THROUGH CORRESPONDENCE AND OPEN UNIVERSITIES:

Distance education or distance learning is the education of students who may not always be physically present at a school. Traditionally this usually involved correspondence courses wherein the

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student corresponded with the school via post. Today it involves online education. Courses that are conducted (51 percent or more) are either hybrid, blended or 100% whole instruction.Distance education or distance learning is an area of education that focuses on using technology and alternative teaching methods to teach. The students and teachers, unlike conventional settings such as classrooms, have time and distance separating them.

This field of education has given millions of people access to education without having to be physically present at a place. People from various backgrounds take up distance education programmes. It has been especially helpful to young professionals who are seeking to build up on their education while working at a regular job. This form of education also helps many people from economically weaker sections that may not be able to commit themselves to regular college.

Many students, especially those working full-time or with other obligations, enjoy the flexibility correspondence courses offer. There is typically no set schedule for correspondence courses, allowing students to complete assignments at any time of the day. However, these classes may have a maximum time limit when students must complete the class. This is most common for classes where student can earn college credit.There are at present 13 State Open Universities set up by the respective state grants (as per details below), are single mode institutions, which means they provide education only in the distance mode. These universities cater to people who are unable to pursue regular courses due to various reasons. These Universities are also instrumental in shaping the career growth of learner who is already employed.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH CORRESPONDENCE COURSES AND OPEN UNIVERSITIES

Correspondence courses offer various courses in various streams and so that those people who are working and unable to attend the regular classes so that they can easily enhance their knowledge as well as education. In respect of gender equality in India most of the women are there who has left their education in amidst and due to their household work they are unable to go to colleges and complete their education. This correspondence course opens a door to complete the education in free atmosphere without any regularity of classes etc.

Leach, (1988) points out that there is generally 'under representation of women in highly skilled and professional employment, in politics and until recently, in the design of development policy and strategy. Gender inequality in access of education may exclude women from the mainstream of economic, social and political life as no education at all, (Fagerlind and Saha, 1992). In attempt to eliminate gender inequality in education, the global education agenda has raised awareness for the support of gender parity and gender equality in education as the Human Development report for 1995 declares that 'If human development is not engendered, it is endangered'. Development goals now focus on gender equality and women empowerment. Goal number three of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), is to promote gender equality and women empowerment. The fourth target of this goal is to eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005 and at all levels of education by 2015, (UNESCO Global Monitoring Report, 2005). Therefore, the shift in the international education goals beyond gender parity to gender equality has had a positive influence in promoting a meaningful education agenda towards the education of females in relation to males. In addition the Post-2015 development frame work should consider gender equality as a central for sustainable development (UN WOMEN, 2014). Statistics from Open and Distance Institutions confirm the potential of ODL in achieving gender parity in education in terms of access between males and female (Odwoa and Frimpong, 2008). Achieving gender equality in education implies equality of opportunities for males in relation to females, equality in the learning process, equality of outcomes as well as equality of external results after leaving education (UNESCO, 2004).

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EDUCATION THROUGH VIRTUAL UNIVERSITIES

A virtual university provides higher education programs through electronic media, typically the Internet. Some are bricks-and-mortar institutions that provide online learning as part of their extended university courses while others solely offer online courses. They are regarded as a form of distance education. The goal of virtual universities is to provide access to the part of the population who would not be able to attend a physical campus, for reasons such as distance — in which students live too far from a physical campus to attend regular classes; and the need for flexibility — some students need the flexibility to study at home whenever it is convenient for them to do so.

Some of these organizations exist only as loosely tied combines of universities, institutes or departments that together provide a number of courses over the Internet, television or other media, that are separate and distinct from programs offered by the single institution outside of the combine. Others are individual organizations with a legal framework, yet are named "virtual" because they appear only on the Internet, without a physical location aside from their administration units. Still other virtual universities can be organized through specific or multiple physical locations, with or without actual campuses to receive program delivery through technological media that is broadcast from another location where professors give televised lectures.

Program delivery in a virtual university is administered through information communication technology such as web pages, e-mail and other networked sources.

As virtual universities are relatively new and vary widely, questions remain about accreditation and the quality of assessment.

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY THROUGH VIRTUAL UNIVERSITIES

Through Virtual universities Gender equality can be promoted, Virtual University concept has been inherited in India by the Delhi University which opens a door to the virtual world for imparting education and through education it changes the perspectives of the mankind. The inequality which is in our society regarding work, labor gender etc. can be lessening by imparting valuable thoughts through Virtual Universities. Through Virtual Universities women can get the same and equal opportunities to enhance their knowledge and upgrade their education.

CONCLUSION

Amartya Sen, often referred to as the father of the concept of 'human development', reminds us of a quote by H.G. Wells, where he said that "human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe". Sen maintains that "if we continue to leave vast sections of the people of the world outside the orbit of education, we make the world not only less just, but also less secure". To Sen, the gender aspect of education is a direct link between illiteracy and women's security.
Not being able to read or write is a significant barrier for underprivileged women, since this can lead to their failure to make use of even the rather limited rights they may legally have (to own land or other property, or to appeal against unfair judgment and unjust treatment). There are often legal rights in rule books that are not used because the aggrieved parties cannot read those rule books. Gaps in schooling can, therefore, directly lead to insecurity by distancing the deprived from the ways and means of fighting against that deprivation.[1]

For Sen, illiteracy and innumeracy are forms of insecurity in themselves, "not to be able to read or write or count or communicate is a tremendous deprivation. The extreme case of insecurity is the certainty of deprivation, and the absence of any chance of avoiding that fate".[2] The link between education and security underlines the importance of education as akin to a basic need in the twenty-first century of human development.

Gender equality can be attain through education and educating people . By the different modes of

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learning any person can study and educate himself for the betterment of his future and a big section of our undereducated people can be educated through this kind of education system and the perspective and outlook towards woman workforce can be changed.

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