

## **A Critical Study on Gender-Bias in Objectives of Open School Learners**

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### **Abstract**

Open Schooling Curriculum has been designed for adult and part time learners. Male and female learners enroll in Open School with certain objectives or aim, which they could not achieve. But their objectives have wide differences. Purposes or aims of male learners to join Open School differ from those of female learners due to their socio-psychological environment. This study was initiated to examine whether 'Gender-Bias' exists in the objectives of Male and Female learners in Open School and to identify those attributes where the difference is significant. Survey method was adopted in this work to collect responses of learners through 'Questionnaire'. This study revealed that male and female learners differ on two basic attributes like, social activities and religious activities, while no significant difference of opinion between the two gender groups of learners is apparent in the matter of other eight objectives like: Aspiration, Co-operation, Understanding, Interest, Problem solving, Self-confidence, Self-respect, Economic Status.

### **Abstrak**

Kurikulum sekolah terbuka telah direka bentuk untuk orang dewasa dan pelajar sambilan. Pelajar lelaki dan perempuan yang berdaftar dalam sekolah terbuka dalam objektif tertentu atau matlamat yang tidak boleh dicapai oleh mereka. Tetapi objektif mereka mempunyai perbezaan yang luas. Matlamat pelajar lelaki untuk mengikuti sekolah terbuka berbeza dengan pelajar perempuan disebabkan oleh persekitaran sosio-psikologi. Kajian ini dijalankan untuk mengkaji sama ada kecenderungan jantina wujud dalam matlamat pelajar lelaki dan pelajar perempuan di sekolah terbuka dan untuk mengenal pasti atribut di mana perbezaannya adalah signifikan. Kaedah tinjauan digunakan dalam kajian ini untuk mengumpul maklum balas pelajar melalui soal selidik. Kajian ini menunjukkan pelajar lelaki dan pelajar perempuan berbeza dalam dua atribut iaitu aktiviti sosial dan aktiviti keagamaan. Walau bagaimanapun tidak ada perbezaan

pendapat yang signifikan antara dua kumpulan jantina berkaitan dengan lapan objektif lain iaitu aspirasi, kerjasama, kefahaman, minat, penyelesaian masalah, keyakinan diri, kepercayaan diri dan status ekonomi.

## **Introduction**

The provision of educational opportunities for women has been an important part of the national endeavour in the field of education since India's Independence. Though these endeavours did yield significant results, gender disparity persists with uncompromising tenacity, more so in the rural areas and among the disadvantaged communities. This is not only a matter of national anxiety and concern but also a matter of national conscience. It is with this concern that the Government of India launched the National Literacy Mission in 1988 for eradication of adult illiteracy. Since women account for an overwhelming percentage of the total number of illiterates, the National Literacy Mission proposes a mission to impart functional literacy to women. Total literacy campaigns launched since 1988 under the aegis of the National Literacy mission emphasis on making efforts to:

- Create an environment where women demand knowledge and information, empowering themselves to change their lives.
- Inculcate in women the confidence that change is possible, if women work collectively.
- Spread the message that education of women is a pre-condition for fighting against their oppression.

Historically, a variety of fundamental factors have been found to be responsible for poor female literacy rate, as noted follows:

- Gender based inequality
- Social discrimination and economic exploitation
- Occupation of girl child in domestic chores
- Low enrolment of girls in schools

The main strategies adopted by the Government for increasing female literacy in the country include:

- National Literacy Mission for imparting functional literacy
- Universalisation of Elementary Education
- Non-Formal Education
- Open Education under distance mode

The area in which women's equality has shown a major improvement as a result of adult literacy programs is the area of enrolment of boys and girls in schools. As a result of higher participation of women in literacy campaigns, the gender gap in literacy levels is gradually getting reduced. Even more significant is the fact that disparity in enrolment of boys and girls in neo-literate households is much lowered compared to the non-literate householders.

Curriculum of Open School has certain distinctive features widely different from the conventional school being targeted towards women, working people and other disadvantaged sections of the society. Naturally, the question arises: How the new clientele group of adult learners adopted themselves to the new learning environment of Open School? Does the Open School achieve its goal to fulfill the aspiration of the adult learners? As a matter of fact adult part time learners enroll in open schools with certain objectives or expectations. But male and female learners do not have identical aspirations. Aim of education at this stage differs widely for male and female students. Hence, objectives of learners have certain biases in respect of gender of the learners. So the research question is: Does gender - bias exists in the objectives of open school learners? With these proposition in view this study was initiated to conduct a survey on the adult learners who enrolled themselves in various study centers of Open School under State Government (W.B) and National Institute of Open Schooling (New Delhi).

The primary aim of this study is to review whether male and female learners of Open School differ in their objective attributes and to identify those objectives where this difference is significant. Accordingly the research hypotheses are:

- (i) There is no significant difference between the two gender groups of learners in Open School in reference to a specific objective attribute.

- (ii) There is no significant difference between the overall responses of the male and female learners of Open School in regard to objectives attributes.

### **Methodology**

This study was initiated to review the difference or divergence in objectives of male and female learners of Open School. As a matter of fact part time learners in Open School have certain purposes, objective and aspirations. Considering the environment of part time learners, the main objective attributes which are found to be latent in them may be as follows:

- (i) Community Service
- (ii) Religious Activities
- (iii) Aspiration
- (iv) Co-operation
- (v) Understanding
- (vi) Interest
- (vii) Problem Solving
- (viii) Self-confidence
- (ix) Self-respect
- (x) Economic Status

With the above 10 variables in view, a Questionnaire (Table 1) was prepared incorporating all the proposed variables. So the questionnaire contains 10 questions in all. The questions are of close ended type and the learners are required to answer in YES, NO and UD (Undecided ) format.

**Table 1** Questions on Objective Attributes

Q. No.	Questions	Attributes
1	Do you perform community service regularly?	Community Service
2	Do you perform any religious activities regularly?	Religious Activities
3	Do you think that this course would satisfy your educational aspiration?	Aspiration
4	Do you think that the members of your family will co-operate you in continuing the course?	Cooperation
5	Do you think that this course will help you to understand many social and political problems?	Understanding
6	Do you join the course out of your own intentions and interest?	Interest
7	Do you think this education would ease many problems in your life?	Problem Solving
8	Do you think this education will make you more self confident?	Self-confidence
9	Do you think this education will earn you more respect in society and family?	Self-respect
10	Do you think this education would raise your economic standard?	Economic Status

Three districts Bankura, Medinipur and Puruliya which are situated in the south-western part of West Bengal were selected for this study. There are 10 study centers of National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS), New Delhi and State Open School, West Bengal taken together in this region. The questionnaires were sent to the coordinators of some of those centers and some centers were visited by the author to collect responses of the adult learners. In all 204 responses were collected from the learners from those study centres who enrolled in December 2004 session. The responses thus received were then quantised and statistical tests were carried out to justify the level of significance of two gender groups on the attributes under study. It may be pointed out here that out of 204 respondents, 103 were female learners and 101 were male learners. So the sample size for male group is 101 while for that of female group is 103.

The survey was conducted on the students enrolled in the academic session December 2004 session in different study centers of Open Schools. This study does not differentiate the students of state open school (RMV) and National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS). Moreover this study is restricted to the study centers located in the region as indicated in the report.

## Results

In the first part of the analysis, Chi-square tests (Table 2) were carried out question-wise to calculate the chi-square values for each attributes under study. If the calculated chi-square value is less than the critical value 3.219 (0.20 level of significance) at 2 degrees of freedom, corresponding Null Hypothesis (Ho) was accepted. In the second part of the study, t-test (Table 3) was carried out for two grouped set of data on basis of major response of male and female learners in the two gender groups. In this case, null hypothesis was tested at 0.01 level of significance for 9 degrees of freedom.

**Table 2** Chi-square Test for Objective Attributes

Q. No	Gender	Yes	No	UD	Total	$\chi^2$	dN	L.S	t0	Remark
1	Male	56	45	0	101	16.49	2	0.20	3.22	Ho. Rejected
	Female	31	67	5	103					
2	Male	71	29	1	101	10.55				Ho. Rejected
	Female	50	49	4	103					
3	Male	94	6	1	101	1.40				Ho. Accepted
	Female	96	4	3	103					
4	Male	97	3	1	101	2.67				Ho. Accepted
	Female	95	3	5	103					
5	Male	86	9	6	101	1.25				Ho. Accepted
	Female	93	6	4	103					
6	Male	96	4	1	101	1.77				Ho. Accepted
	Female	101	2	0	103					

*Continued on the next page*

**Table 2** (continued)

Q. No	Gender	Yes	No	UD	Total	$\chi^2$	dN	L.S	t0	Remark
7	Male	96	4	1	101	0.17				Ho. Accepted
	Female	99	3	1	103					
8	Male	91	6	4	101	2.44				Ho. Accepted
	Female	98	4	1	103					
9	Male	96	4	1	101	0.48				Ho. Accepted
	Female	98	3	2	103					
10	Male	91	2	8	101	1.91				Ho. Accepted
	Female	98	1	4	103					

Chi-square tests also revealed that chi-square values of the attributes corresponding to the questions 1 and 2 are more than the critical value 3.219 (0.20 level of significance) for 2 degrees of freedom. So the corresponding null hypotheses are rejected. Hence, male and female learners differ on their opinion in the matter of Community Service and Religious Activities.

However, t-Test revealed that there is no significant difference between the two gender group of learners relating to their objective attributes as a whole. Calculated t-value is 0.404 which is less than 1.38 (0.10 level of significance) for 9 degrees of freedom. Hence null hypothesis is accepted at this level of significance.

**Table 3** t-Test for Objective Attributes

Q. No	Male	Female	ui	ui <sup>2</sup>	s	t	to	L.S	Remark
1	56	31	25	1259	11.72	.404	1.383	0.1	Ho. Accepted
2	71	50	21						
3	94	96	-2						
4	97	95	2						
5	86	93	-7						
6	96	101	-5						
7	96	99	-3						
8	91	98	-7						
9	96	98	-2						
10	91	98	-7						

This study revealed that male and female learners differ on two objective attributes and these are:

Q.1: Out of 204 learners 56 male and 31 female learners are found to perform Community service. So, male learners are more actively involved in community services.

Q.2: Out of 204 respondents, 71 male and 50 female learners take part in religious activities. So, male learners are more involved in religious activities than female learners.

Male and female learners agree on the following eight objective attributes. However, there is certain variation of percentage of their responses towards the objectives.

Q.3: Out of 204 learners, 94 male and 96 female learners think that this course would satisfy their educational aspiration. So, both gender groups of learners are equally optimistic about this objective attribute.

Q.4: Out of 204 learners, 97 male and 95 female learners think that family members would help them to continue their studies. So, male learners and female learners do not fear any kind of resistance from their home front in this matter.

Q.5: Out of 204 learners, 86 male learners and 93 female learners admits that this course would help them to understand many socio-political problems. So, female learners are more positive about this objective attribute latent in the course of Open School.

Q.6: 96 male and 101 female learners join the course out of their own interest and intentions which are the basic characteristics of adult learners. So, female learners are more interested and intent to join the course.

Q.7: 96 male and 99 female learners believe that course in open school would assist them to face the basic problems of life in a better way.



- Q.8: 91 male and 98 female learners admit that this course would make them more self confident. So both gender group of learners are equally optimistic to achieve self confidence after completing the course.
- Q.9: 91 male and 98 female learners believe that this education at the secondary level would bring them more respect in the society. So, female learners are more determined to join the course for gaining social respect.
- Q.10: 91 male and 98 female learners are hopeful to enhance their economic standard after this course. So, female learners are more optimistic to achieve economic gain from this course.

### **Summary**

In reference to the study above, Open Schools should be more vigilant about the following issues:

- (i) Course materials should include those issues which would make learner's environment conscious so that they can adopt a scientific attitude towards their surroundings.
- (ii) Courses should include topics relating to the fundamental rights of a citizen to make them aware of their basic rights in the society. This will make them more confident.
- (iii) Emphasis should be given to vocational and other professional courses to make them self reliant and economically dependent.
- (iv) The course should include extra curricular activities leaving scopes for debate on current socio-political problems, recitations, extempore speech and etc. This will make them more conscious to various problems of the state and the society.

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