Volume 86, Issue 1 January – June 2025

INDIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT EDUCATION

A Publication of Indian Adult Edcation Association
17-B Indraprastha Estate, New Delhi 110002

Find this journal
at http://iaea-india.in
ISSN 0019-5006

Indian Journal of Adult Education (IJAE) is a peer-reviewed journal published by the Indian Adult Education Association since 1939. It is recognized by the University Grants Commission under the UGC CARE list (No. 117) of journals. It publishes twice a year in June and December, and the journal does not charge any processing fee. While submissions are invited from around the world, priority in publication will be given to the members of the Association. The journal invites original articles and book reviews on Adult Education and Lifelong Learning as per the guidelines given on the inner back cover of the journal.

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Printed at M/s Graphic World, 1686, Kucha Dakhni Rai, Darya Ganj, New Delhi -110002.

Subscription
Annual subscription rate for Indian Subscribers is Rs. 750+38 (Seven Hundred Fifty plus 5% GST) and for overseas US $ 50 (Fifty only). For matters related to subscription, change of address, receipt of copy, contact:
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INDIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT EDUCATION

Volume 86, Issue 1 **January-June 2025**

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 3-17
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00001.4
ISSN 0019-5006

X-raying the Implementation Status of Recommendations of UNESCO's Sixth International Conference on Adult Education in Nigeria

• **K. O. Ojokheta**[1] • **T. O. Olunubi**[2]

Abstract

The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education was organised by UNESCO and held in the city of Belem, Brazil in 2009 and it produced the Belem Framework for Action which UNESCO Member States were urged to faithfully implement for the promotion and development of adult education or adult learning and education as UNESCO calls it. This paper was written x-raying the detailed components of the Belem Framework for Action and ascertaining its implementation status in Nigeria. The essence of the paper was to draw attention of education policy makers and relevant stakeholders in adult education in Nigeria of what the country had done and what remains to be done for the faithful implementation of the recommendations. The paper established that Nigeria has not substantially implemented the Framework for Action as there are a lot yet to be done and it put forward recommendations on what the country needs to put in place to show her commitment to implementing the Framework for Action. The paper concluded that Nigeria will be counted among countries that have shown more commitment to promoting and developing adult education if the recommendations specified are strictly adhered to by education policy makers and relevant stakeholders

Keywords: *Adult education, UNESCO, 6th International Conference, key recommendations and Framework for Action.*

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Introduction

The Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, technically called the CONFINTEA Vl was organised by UNESCO and was held in the City of *Belem do Para* in Brazil from 1-4 December 2009. The Conference brought together 1,100 people from 144 UNESCO Member States, United Nation agencies, multi-and bilateral cooperation agencies, organisations from civil society, the private sector, and learners from all the world and it provided an important platform for policy dialogue on adult learning and non-formal education at the global level (Henschke, 2010). The theme of the conference was *"Harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education for a viable future*" and the outcome was the adoption of Belem Framework for Action to guide all UNESCO Member States in harnessing the power and potential of adult learning and education (UNESCO 2009).

Some of the major objectives of the conference included: (1) to push forward the recognition of adult learning and education as an important element of and foundational factor conducive to lifelong learning; and (2) to highlight the crucial role of adult learning and education for the realisation of *Education-for-all (EFA), Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), United Nations Literacy Decade (UNLD), Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), and the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)* 2005-2014.

The key recommendations in the Belem Framework for Action (BFA) were the identification of five priority areas for action *(policy framework, governance framework, financing framework, participation, inclusion, equity framework, and quality framework)* which countries must adopt in the promotion of adult learning and education (ALE). These five priority areas of actions were overwhelmingly reaffirmed at the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA Vll) held in Marrakech, Morocco in 2022 (UNESCO 2022) and are still relevant till today (Ojokheta and Edeh, 2024). Nigeria was a key signatory of the Belem Framework for Action. It becomes imperative to assess the compliance and implementation level of the Framework for Action in the country - fourteen years after its adoption.

Rationale for Recommendations of the Belem Framework for Action (BFA)

The Statement of Evidence which provided the rationale for the Belem Framework for Action included the following:

1. A new recognition and definition of adult education or ALE – At the Conference, adult learning and education was recognised as an essential element of the right to education and UNESCO Member States were urged to chart a new and urgent course of action to enable all young people and adults to exercise this right. Adult learning and education was defined as:

> the entire body of ongoing learning processes, formal or otherwise, whereby people regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, and improve their technical and professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction to meet their own needs and those of their society (p. 5).

2. Accelerated pace for promotion of agenda of adult learning and education – In all the previous five UNESCO's International Conferences on Adult Education (CONFINTEA l-V), Member States had consistently agreed to take forward the agenda of adult learning and education at an accelerated pace with a sense of urgency (Ireland, 2014: Knoll, 2014).

3. Literacy as the most significant foundation for building lifelong learning – The Belem Framework of Action recognised literacy as the most significant foundation upon which to build comprehensive, inclusive and integrated lifelong and life-wide learning for all young people and adults to cope with social, economic, and political crises. UNESCO Member States were, therefore, urged to redouble their efforts to ensure that adult literacy goals and priorities are achieved by all means possible.

4. Lifelong learning as the basis of knowledge-based society – The Belem Framework of Action noted that lifelong learning is a philosophy, a conceptual framework, and an organising principle of all forms of education and should be considered an integral vision of a knowledge-based society.

5. Adult learning and Education as a significant component of the lifelong learning process – Adult learning and education was also recognised in Belem Framework for Action as representing a significant component of the lifelong learning process which embraces a learning continuum ranging from formal to non-formal to informal learning. It focuses on the learning needs of young people, adults and older people and covers a broad range of content – general issues, vocational matters, family literacy and family education, citizenship, among others depending on the priorities and the specific needs of individual countries. The Framework further

noted that adult learning and education equips people with the necessary knowledge, capabilities, skills, competences and values to exercise their rights and take control of their destinies. It is also an imperative for the achievement of equity and inclusion, for alleviating poverty and for building equitable, tolerant, sustainable and knowledge based societies.

Dissecting the Belem Framework for Action

The Belem Framework for Action was adopted to guide UNESCO Member States in the promotion of adult learning and education based on the six pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, learning to live together, learning to change, and learning for sustainability (Belem Framework for Action, 2009). The six recommendations in the Framework for Action included:

1. Policy Framework – UNESCO Member States were called upon to develop comprehensive, inclusive and integrated policies for adult learning and education that address learning in a wide range of spheres, including the economic, political, social, cultural, technological and environmental. Thus, Member Sates committed to:

(a) Developing and implementing fully-costed policies, well-targeted plans and legislation for addressing adult literacy, education for young people and adults, and lifelong learning.
(b) Designing specific and concrete action plans for adult learning and education which are integrated into national development plans.
(c) Establishing appropriate coordination mechanisms involving all stakeholders active in adult learning and education; and
(d) Developing or improving structures and mechanisms for the recognition, validation and accreditation of all forms of learning by establishing equivalency frameworks.

2. Governance Framework - The Framework for Action observed that effective, transparent, accountable and equitable implementation of adult learning and education policy is generally facilitated by good governance. Therefore, UNESCO Member States committed to:

(a) Creating and maintaining mechanisms for the involvement of public authorities at all administrative levels, civil society organisations, social partners, the private sector, community and adult learners' and educators' organisation in the development, implementation and evaluation of adult learning and education policies and programmes.

(b) Undertaking capacity-building measures to support the constructive and informed involvement of civil society organisations, community and adult learners' organisations, as appropriate, in policy and programme development, implementation and evaluation.
(c) Promoting and supporting inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial cooperation; and
(e) Fostering transnational cooperation through projects and networks for sharing know-how and innovative practice.

3. Financing Framework - The Framework for Action also noted that significant investment is highly essential to ensure quality provision of adult learning and education. As a result, UNESCO Member States committed to:

(a) Accelerating progress towards achieving CONFINTEA V recommendation to seek investment of at least 6% of Gross National Product (GNP) in education and working towards increased investment in adult learning and education.
(b) Expanding existing educational resources and budgets across all government departments to meet the objectives of an integrated adult learning and education strategy.
(c) Considering new, and opening up existing, transnational funding programmes for literacy and adult education along the lines of the actions taken under the European Union (EU) Lifelong Learning Programme.
(d) Creating incentives to promote new sources of funding from the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), communities and individuals, without prejudicing the principles of equity and inclusion; and
(e) Prioritising investment in lifelong learning for women, rural populations and people with disabilities.

4. Participation, Inclusion and Equity Framework - The Framework for Action equally observed that inclusive education is fundamental to achieving human, social and economic development. Equipping all individuals to develop their potential contributes significantly to encouraging them to live together in harmony and with dignity. There can be no exclusion from adult learning and education arising from age, gender, ethnicity, migrant status, language, religion, disability, rurality, sexual identity or orientation, poverty, displacement or imprisonment.

Therefore, UNESCO Member States committed to:

(a) Promoting and facilitating more equitable access to, and participation in, adult learning and education by enhancing a culture of learning and by eliminating barriers to participation.
(b) Promoting and supporting more equitable access to, and participation in, adult learning and education through well-designed and targeted guidance and information, as well as activities and programmes such as *Adult Learners Weeks* and learning festivals.
(c) Anticipating and responding to identifiable groups entering trajectories of multiple disadvantages, particular in early childhood.
(d) Creating multi-purpose community learning spaces/centres and improving access to, and participation in, full range of adult learning and education programmes for women, taking account of the particular demands of the gender-specific life-course.
(e) Supporting the development of writing and literacy in the various indigenous languages by developing relevant programmes, methods and materials that recognise and value the indigenous cultures, knowledge and methodologies, while adequately developing the teaching of the second language of wider communication.
(f) Supporting financially a systematic focus on disadvantaged groups (indigenous peoples, migrants, people with special needs and those living in the rural areas) in all educational policies and approaches through incentives including free of fees or subsidised programmes, bursaries, fee remission, and paid study leave.
(g) Providing adult learning and education in prison at all appropriate levels.
(h) Adopting a holistic, integrated approach to identifying stakeholders and the responsibilities of the state in partnership with civil society organisations, labour market stakeholders, learners and educators.
(i) Developing effective educational responses for migrants and refugees as a key focus for development work.

5. Quality framework - The Framework for Action also noted that quality in learning and education is a holistic, multidimensional concept and practice that demands constant attention and continuous development. In this regard, UNESCO Member States committed to:

(a) Developing quality criteria for curricula, learning materials and teaching methodologies in adult education programmes, taking account of outcomes and impact measures.

(b) Recognising the diversity and plurality of providers.
(c) Improving training, capacity-building, employment conditions and professionalisation of adult educators, e.g. through the establishment of partnerships with higher education institutions, teacher associations and civil society organisations.
(d) Elaborating criteria to assess the learning outcomes of adults at various levels.
(e) Putting in place precise quality indicators.
(f) Lending greater support to systematic interdisciplinary research in adult learning and education, complemented by knowledge management systems for the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and good practice.

6. Monitoring the implementation of the Belem Framework for Action - The Framework for Action called on countries to reinvigorating adult learning and education by ensuring that accountability and monitoring measures are put in place. In this regard, UNESCO Member States committed to:

(a) Investing in a process to develop a set of comparable data indicators for literacy as a continuum and for adult learning and education.
(b) Regularly collecting and analysing data and information on participation and progression in adult learning and education programmes.
(c) Establishing a regular monitoring mechanism to assess the implementation of the commitments to the Framework.
(d) Preparation of triennial progress report to be submitted to UNESCO.
(e) Initiating regional monitoring mechanisms with clear benchmarks and indicators.
(f) Producing a national report for a CONFINTEA Vl Mid-Term Review, coinciding with the EFA and MDG timeline of 2015, and
(g) Monitoring collaboration in adult education across disciplines and across sectors such as agriculture, health and employment.

X-raying Implementation Status of the Belem Framework for Action in Nigeria

The Belem Framework for Action laid a detailed framework for the global promotion of adult learning and education. It, therefore, becomes imperative to reflect on how the Framework for Action has so far been implemented in Nigeria.

1. Policy Development - Has Nigeria developed a comprehensive policy on adult learning and education? The answer to this question is derived from three sources: (1) *The Regional Synthesis Report on the State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in sub-Saharan Africa compiled by John Aitchison and Hassana Alidou* and published by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in 2009; (2) *The Regional Report on the Status of Adult Learning and Education in sub-Saharan Africa compiled by John Aitchison* and published by the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) in 2017; and (3) the Nigerian National Policy on Education, 6th Edition 2013.

In the first synthetic report, African countries reported to have national adult education policies were Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Cape Verde, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Madagascar, Namibia, Niger and South Africa (p. 12). This implies that Nigeria is yet to have a national adult education policy. In addition, in the second synthesis report, Nigeria was listed among countries that restrict their adult education definition to literacy (alphabétisation) or adult basic education (pp. 8-9). This is also reflected in the Nigerian National Policy on Education, 6th edition 2013. Section 4 of the National Policy is myopically titled "Mass and Nomadic Education" with two sub-sections: (a) "*Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education*" (p. 19) and (b) "*Nomadic Education*" (p. 21). Adult and non-formal education was considered in the policy as "equivalent of basic education given to adults, children and youths of formal school age, outside the formal school system". This connotes that Nigeria is yet to have a comprehensive guiding definition and policy development on adult learning and education in compliance with the Belem Framework for Action.

2. Governance Framework – It is in Section 4 of the National Policy of Education that the governance framework on adult learning and education ought to have been clearly stated. However, the Section did not discuss this governance framework in line with the Belem Framework for Action. Specifically, the Section did not discuss the mechanisms for the involvement of public authorities, civil society organisations, social partners, the private sector, community and adult learners' and educators' organisations in the development, implementation and evaluation of adult learning and education policies and programmes. It also did not state inter-sectoral and inter-ministerial cooperation in policy and programme development as well as the capacity-building measures to support the constructive and informed involvement of civil society organisations, community and adult learners' organisations. This connotes that Nigeria is yet to have a detailed governance framework on adult learning and education in compliance with the Belem Framework for Action.

3. Financial Framework - In Nigeria, there is the inadequate recognition by education policy makers, government ministries, departments, and agencies, and non-stakeholders of adult learning and education as a diverse and multi-sectoral field. This is because adult learning and education is largely equated to literacy education as shown the National Policy on Education. As a result, it is very difficult to ascertain how much is in fact spent each year in Nigeria on adult learning and education in comparison to that on formal education. In the 2009 Regional Synthesis Report on the State and Development of Adult Learning and Education in sub-Saharan Africa compiled by John Aitchison and Hassana Alidou, Nigeria was reported to be spending 2.43 per cent of its national education budget on adult learning and education (p. 21). This marginal nature of spending on adult education in the national education budget remains the same till date.

In addition, there has not been any consideration of new funding pattern of adult learning and education as well as the creation of mechanisms to promote new sources of funding from the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), communities and individuals, of adult learning and education. Similarly, the expansion of existing educational resources and budgets across all government departments to meet the objectives of an integrated adult learning and education strategy has not been met. In essence, adult education funding is seen as an optional extra grafted on to the normal education budget. Invariably, the funding of adult learning and education in Nigeria substantially falls short of the recommendation of the Belem Framework for Action.

4. Participation, Inclusion and Equity Framework – In Nigeria, the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), the government agency responsible for implementing adult and non-formal education policies and programmes, has been active in the development of writing and literacy materials in the various indigenous languages by developing relevant programmes, methods and materials; it has created, to a large extent, multi-purpose community learning spaces and centres for improving access to and participation of disadvantaged groups in various categories of adult learning and education programmes; it has provided implementation mechanism of adult education in Nigerian prisons or correctional centres; it has also been able to identify stakeholders such as the nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) civil society organisations (CSOs), learners and facilitators as well as the responsibility of the States in the promotion of adult education.

However, other aspects in the Belem Framework for Action yet to be substantially addressed include: (i) the recognition of adult education or ALE as a diverse and

multi-sectoral field, (ii) the difficulty in accessing information and data on all adult education providers, (iii) the absence of precise and concise statistical data on categorising the variety of adult education programmes, (iv) the lack of specific information on the participation rate of youths and adult learners in adult education programmes in Nigeria, (v) the low sectoral participation especially from the private sector, (vi) the absence of national qualifications framework (NQF), and (vii) the specific lack of a participatory monitoring and evaluation system. This connotes that there are still a lot to be done in achieving the participation, inclusion and equity framework of adult learning and education in relation to the specifications of the Belem Framework for Action.

5. Quality Framework - The National Commission of Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) in Nigeria has recorded appreciable progress in recognising the diversity and plurality of providers of adult education, (many nongovernmental organisations and civil society organisations) partnering with Commission in providing adult education programmes in literacy, post-literacy, and vocational education programme. So also, the Commission has, from time to time, organised training and capacity-building programmes for literacy facilitators and adult education personnel of NGOs and CSOs. Similarly, the Departments of Adult Education in Nigerian Universities, most times in collaboration with the Commission, have conducted interdisciplinary researches in adult education with greater impacts in understanding adult education as a field of study and practice. However, there are many areas in the Belem Framework for Action that are yet to be achieved. These areas include: the development of quality criteria and indicators for curricula, learning materials and teaching methodologies in adult education programmes; the development of criteria to be adopted in assessing the learning outcomes of adults at various levels; and professionalisation of adult educators as well as their employment conditions. It can be concluded that Nigeria has largely implemented some aspects of Belem Framework for Action on quality framework while some aspects are yet to be implemented.

Monitoring the Implementation of Belem Framework for Action - There is no available concrete evidence published to show that Nigeria has developed a set of comparable data indicators for adult education; or regular collection and analysis of data and information system on participation and progression in adult education programmes; or a regular monitoring mechanism in assessing the implementation of the recommendations of the Belem Framework for Action; or submission of a triennial progress report on the implementation of the Belem Framework for Action to UNESCO. Similarly, there is yet to be established collaboration mechanism in adult

education across disciplines and across sectors such as agriculture, health and employment. Therefore, it can be asserted that the monitoring of the implementation of Belem Framework for Action in Nigeria has suffered substantial neglect. In all, it can be concluded that Nigeria has not substantially implemented the Belem Framework for Action as discussed above.

Conclusion

Adult Education or Adult Learning and Education (ALE), as UNESCO calls it, is too important to be neglected. It is in this context that Belem Framework for Action, which emanated from the 2009 UNESCO's organised Sixth International Conference on Adult Education, produced an important, all-embracing blueprint for the global promotion and development of adult learning and education. The implementation status of the Framework for Action in Nigeria has clearly revealed that the country has not substantially implemented most of the recommendations contained in the Framework. This paper has identified what the country needs to do for further implementation of the Framework for Action. It is strongly believed that Nigeria will be counted among countries that have shown more commitment to promoting and developing adult education if the recommendations specified in this paper are strictly adhered to by education policy makers and relevant stakeholders, including government departments and agencies.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will substantially help in accelerating the effective implementation of the Belem Framework for Action in Nigeria if they are faithfully implemented by education policy makers and the National Commission of Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) with support from the Federal Ministry of Education.

1. Re-formulation of the Definition of Adult Education for Policy development – Education policy makers in Nigeria are urged to reformulate the definition of Adult Education in line with the 2015 *Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE). In this Recommendation*, Adult Education was perceived as:

> a core component of lifelong learning. It comprises all forms of education and learning that aim to ensure that all adults participate in their societies and the world of work. It denotes the entire body of learning processes, formal, nonformal and informal, whereby those regarded as adults by the society in which they

live, develop and enrich their capabilities for living and working, both in their own interests and those of their communities, organizations and societies (UNESCO and UIL, 2016,p. 6).

2. Updating Section 4 of National Policy on Education to include the Establishment of Governance Framework for Adult Education in Nigeria – Section 4 of the National Policy of Education of Nigeria should be revisited with a view of incorporating a well-defined governance framework for Adult Education in Nigeria in conformity with the Recommendations of the 6th International Conference on Adult Education and the Belem Framework for Action. Therefore, Education policy makers in Nigeria, in conjunction with the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education and the Nigerian National Council for Adult Education (NNCAE), should work-out the modalities for an appropriate governance framework on Adult Education in Nigeria using the recommendation of the 6th International Conference on Adult Education as a guide.

3. Development of New Funding Pattern for Adult Education in Nigeria – To improve funding/financing of Adult Education in Nigeria in line with the recommendation of the 6th International Conference on Adult Education and Belem Framework for Action, it is proposed that the Federal Government of Nigeria should adopt and through, the National Assemblies, enact a law to back this suggested mechanism:

i. Allocation of 3% of the Education Budget to Adult Education - At least 3%, as a percentage of the education budget, should be devoted to funding Adult Education as recommended by Bonn, Germany Conference on International Financing of Adult Education.

ii. Adult Education Promotion Tax from Government Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) - MDAs should be mandated by law to include 1% for literacy promotion before such budget is presented to the national assembly.

iii. Adult Education Promotion Tax from GSM Service Providers - GSM service providers should be mandated by law to set aside 2% of their deductible profits before- tax for the promotion of Adult Education.

iv. Adult Education Promotion Tax from Companies Income Tax – It is suggested that 2% of company income tax imposed on the income of all companies operating in Nigeria should be set aside for the promotion of adult education as a diverse and multi-sectoral field.

v. Adult Education Promotion Tax from Value Added Tax (VAT). It is suggested that 1% out of the 7.5% consumption tax levied on goods and services supplied in

Nigeria and imported into Nigeria, known as value added tax (VAT), should be set aside for the promotion of adult education as a diverse and multi-sectoral field.

vi. Adult Education Promotion Tax from Import and Excise Duties - It is suggested that 1% import tax or custom duties charged on goods imported into the country should be set aside for the promotion of adult education as a diverse and multi-sectoral field.

4. Establishment of a Comprehensive Participation, Inclusion and Equity Framework - There is the urgent need for the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), with support from Department of Adult Education in Nigerian higher education institutions, the Federal Ministry of Education, UNESCO, and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) to establish a comprehensive framework on participation, inclusion and equity of all to many adult education programmes in Nigeria with special focus on adequate recognition of adult education or ALE as a diverse and multi-sectoral field, compilation of information and data on all adult education providers, compilation of variety of adult education programmes, statistical data on the participation rate of youths and adult learners in adult education programmes, improved sectoral participation in adult education especially from the private sector, (v) national qualifications framework for professionalisation of adult educators, diversification means of delivery of adult education through open and distance as well as the establishment of participatory monitoring and evaluation system.

5. Development of a Comprehensive Quality Framework – There is the urgent need for the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC) to develop a comprehensive quality framework covering quality criteria and indicators for curricula, learning materials and teaching methodologies in adult education programmes, criteria for assessing the learning outcomes of adults at various levels as well as employment conditions and professionalisation of adult educators. In this regard, the Commission is urged to engage in expert consultation with the Department of Adult Education in Nigeria's tertiary institutions to develop the above-mentioned criteria to be included in the comprehensive quality framework for adult education delivery in Nigeria.

6. Development of Mechanisms for Monitoring the Implementation of the Belem Framework for Action in Nigeria – There is the urgent need for the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education (NMEC), with support from Department of Adult Education in Nigerian higher education institutions, the Federal Ministry of Education, UNESCO, and UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) to develop mechanism on a set of comparable data

indicators for adult education, regular collection and analysis of data and information system on participation and progression in adult education programmes, and collaboration in adult education across disciplines and across sectors. Such mechanism will show that is on course in implementing the recommendations of the 6th International Conference on Adult Education and Belem Framework for Action which were substantially endorsed and reiterated at the 7th International Conference on Adult Education and the Marrakech Framework for Action.

7. The Adoption of the *"Faire-Faire"* Strategy in Nigeria - The "*Faire-Faire*" strategy is designed to develop an effective partnership between government and civil society to mobilise resources for adult and non-formal education provision. Learners and local authorities are expected to contribute to the implementation of literacy and adult education programmes. Government literacy and non-formal education officials allocate funds, ensure quality, and evaluate the programmes. This strategy was adopted by ten countries in Africa (Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Togo). The positive effects of the *Faire-Faire* strategy have been documented to include: (1) an increase in resources allocated to non-formal education by government and by international technical and financial partners; (2) the creation of a national fund for literacy and non-formal education; (3) the involvement of civil society in the provision of literacy and non-formal education; (4) a significant increase in participation levels of adult learners, including women; and (5) the promotion of literacy and adult education programmes with curricula increasingly responsive to the specific needs of learners (Aitchison and Alidou, 2009; p.18).

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 18-33
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00002.6
ISSN 0019-5006

Streamlining Financial Investments for Adult Education in India: Challenges and Strategic Interventions

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Abstract

Adult education in India plays a crucial role in fostering socio-economic development by improving literacy, employability, and social equity. However, financial investments in this sector have remained inconsistent, with inadequate budget allocations, inefficient resource utilization, and declining central government contributions. Despite initiatives like the New India Literacy Programme (NILP) and Padhna Likhna Abhiyan (PLA), fluctuating funding patterns have disrupted programme continuity and hindered long-term progress. An analysis of public expenditure trends highlights the limited fiscal priority given to adult education, with spending stagnating at 0.01% of GDP or lower. Regional disparities in funding allocation have further exacerbated accessibility challenges. This study examines the correlation between financial investments and literacy rates, revealing that while states with higher allocations, such as Bihar and Rajasthan, have made progress; inconsistent funding has limited broader impact. To optimize financial investments, strategic recommendations include performance-based financing, increased public-private partnerships, leveraging digital learning solutions, and strengthening monitoring mechanisms. Aligning adult education financing with NEP 2020 and adopting innovative financial models can enhance sustainability and effectiveness. A well-structured financial strategy, supported by multi-stakeholder collaboration and sustained investment, is essential to achieving universal literacy, workforce development, and inclusive growth in India.

Keywords: *Adult education, financial investments, literacy programmes, public-private partnerships, digital learning, NEP 2020, socio-economic development.*

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Introduction

Adult education in India plays a critical role in fostering social and economic development by enhancing literacy, employability, and overall quality of life. It serves as a bridge for marginalized communities, equipping them with essential skills and knowledge to participate actively in the economy (Anderson & Boutelier, 2021). Various programmes, including basic literacy initiatives, vocational training, and continuing education, aim to address educational disparities and create opportunities for lifelong learning (Ritonga et al., 2022). However, despite its importance, adult education remains underfunded and inconsistently prioritized within public policy. Strategic financial investments in adult education are necessary to overcome structural challenges and maximize impact (Parker, 2013; Klasen & Lamanna, 2009). Insufficient funding, inefficient resource allocation, and policy fragmentation have hindered the sector's growth. With India's increasing demand for skilled labour and the need to enhance human capital, a well-planned investment strategy is imperative. Effective funding mechanisms can help expand access to education, improve infrastructure, integrate digital learning solutions, and foster public-private partnerships (Abeni, 2020; Albion, 2015). A targeted financial approach will also enable better programme implementation, ensuring that resources are directed toward areas with the highest need while maintaining long-term sustainability.

Adult education is deeply connected to economic productivity, social equity, and individual empowerment, making it essential to analyse its financial landscape through established theoretical frameworks. Human capital theory highlights the economic benefits of education by linking skill development to increased employability and higher earnings (Shankar & Kidd, 2022; Huis et al., 2017). The capability approach, developed by Amartya Sen, extends this perspective by emphasizing education's role in expanding personal freedoms and opportunities, enabling individuals to make informed choices and improve their quality of life. Social justice frameworks further underscore the necessity of adult education in reducing inequalities, promoting inclusive development, and addressing systemic barriers to learning (Gallie et al., 2016). A closer examination of public expenditure trends in India reveals fluctuating financial commitments, reflecting inconsistent policy direction. While states and union territories have increased their contributions over time, the central government's financial involvement has steadily declined (Khadka, 2020).

The allocation of resources as a percentage of GDP has remained negligible, signifying limited fiscal priority. Programmes like the *New India Literacy Programme* and *Padhna Likhna Abhiyan* have attempted to revitalize adult education, but

inconsistencies in funding and implementation have hampered their effectiveness. The introduction of performance-based financing and public-private partnerships could enhance efficiency, ensuring that investments yield tangible outcomes. A more coherent financial strategy is needed to optimize resource distribution, encourage private sector engagement, and integrate digital solutions into adult learning programmes (Lewis & Bryan, 2021; Nadezhda, 2020). Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and establishing centralized data systems can improve accountability and ensure better tracking of fund utilization (Schendel, 2015; Giraldo-Rodríguez et al., 2019). Regional disparities in funding allocation must also be addressed to ensure that investments reach underserved populations. A sustained commitment to adult education through increased financial support and strategic policymaking will be essential in achieving literacy goals, reducing inequalities, and fostering a skilled workforce capable of driving India's socio-economic progress.

Literature Review

Adult education in India has undergone significant transformations over the decades, shaped by national policies and global literacy movements. From the National Literacy Mission launched in 1988 to the *Saakshar Bharat* initiative and the more recent *New India Literacy Programme*, the focus has gradually expanded from basic literacy to skill development and lifelong learning (Boulton, 2020). While these programmes have played a crucial role in improving literacy rates, their success has been heavily dependent on financial resources (Akintolu & Letseka, 2021). Government funding has fluctuated over time, with central allocations declining in recent years and greater financial responsibility shifting to states and union territories (Ikuenobe, 2001). This uneven distribution of funds has impacted the reach and sustainability of adult education programmes, underscoring the need for a more strategic and coordinated financial approach.

Various financial models have been explored to support adult education, both in India and globally. Public funding remains the primary source, but increasing emphasis has been placed on private partnerships, community-driven initiatives, and alternative financing mechanisms such as microfinance and outcome-based funding (Brookfield, 1998; Kaufman, 2018). International studies highlight the effectiveness of public private partnerships in ensuring financial sustainability, particularly in countries where government budgets are constrained (Tymchuk et al., 2022). In India, however, corporate investment in adult education through corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives has remained limited, with most private sector contributions focusing on skill-based training rather than foundational literacy (Billett, 2018; Holmes & Preston, 2022). The integration of digital learning platforms and technology-driven solutions

presents an opportunity for cost-effective expansion, but financial constraints often limit the adoption of such innovations.

Challenges in financing adult education persist, with insufficient budgetary allocations remaining a major obstacle. Despite policy commitments, adult education continues to receive only a fraction of the overall education budget, with spending as a percentage of GDP stagnating at 0.01 percent or lower. Bureaucratic inefficiencies and overlapping schemes have led to resource misallocation, reducing the impact of existing programmes. The absence of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework further exacerbates these issues, making it difficult to assess the effectiveness of financial investments (Tilak, 2020). Inconsistent fund disbursement and regional disparities in allocation also contribute to inequitable access to adult education, leaving many marginalized communities underserved.

A sustainable financial strategy is required to address these challenges, ensuring that investments are directed toward scalable and impactful interventions (Abeni, 2020; Klasen & Lamanna, 2009). Strengthening policy coherence, enhancing private sector participation, and leveraging technology to reduce costs are essential steps in this process (Stanney et al., 2023). By adopting innovative financial models and improving accountability in fund utilization, India can build a more resilient and effective adult education system capable of addressing the diverse needs of learners and fostering long-term socio-economic development.

Our discussion is divided into four sections:

- Section A: Current Landscape of Financial Investments in Adult Education
- Section B: Challenges in Financial Investments and Correlation Between Expenditure and Literacy Rates
- Section C: Strategic Recommendations for Optimizing Financial Investments
- Section D: Discussion & Conclusion

Section A: Current Landscape of Financial Investments in Adult Education

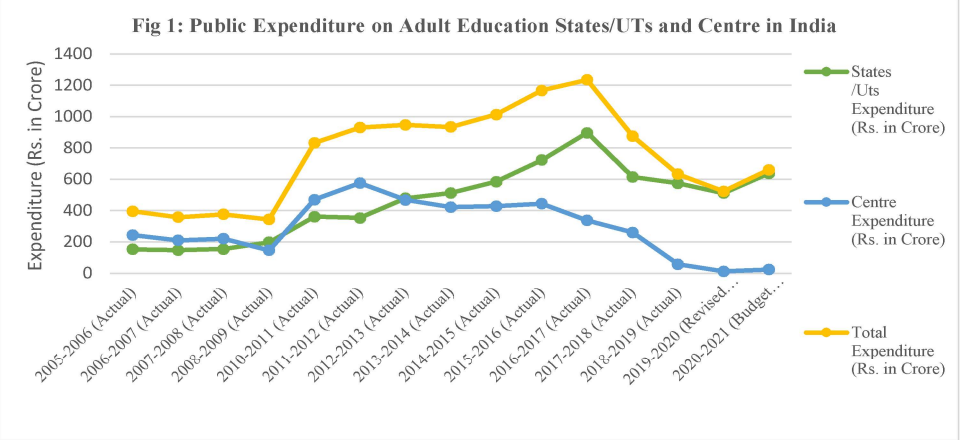
The data on public expenditure and budget allocations for adult education in India from 2005-2006 to 2023-2024 highlights fluctuating investments and limited fiscal prioritization. Despite initiatives like the *New India Literacy Programme* (NILP) and *Padhna Likhna Abhiyan* (PLA), overall funding remains inconsistent and unevenly distributed among states. Expenditure as a percentage of GDP is negligible, underscoring the need for sustained and equitable investments to address literacy challenges and promote lifelong learning across the nation.

Table 1: Public Expenditure on Adult Education as Percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for States/UTs and Centre in India (2005-2006 to 2020-2021)

Expenditure (Rs. in Crores)						
Year	Expenditure by States/UTs	Expenditure by Centre	Total Expenditure	Expenditure as % of GDP (States/UTs)	Expenditure as % of GDP (Centre)	Total Expenditure as % of GDP
2005-2006 (Actual)	152.7	243.46	396.16	0	0.01	0.01
2006-2007 (Actual)	148.15	209.99	358.14	0	0.01	0.01
2007-2008 (Actual)	155.16	221.00	376.16	0	0	0.01
2008-2009 (Actual)	197.65	146.56	344.21	0	0	0.01
2010-2011 (Actual)	361.85	470.53	832.38	0	0.01	0.01
2011-2012 (Actual)	354.14	576.57	930.71	0	0.01	0.01
2012-2013 (Actual)	478.91	468.54	947.45	0	0	0.01
2013-2014 (Actual)	512.06	421.88	933.94	0	0	0.01
2014-2015 (Actual)	585.40	428.22	1013.62	0	0	0.01
2015-2016 (Actual)	722.78	445.06	1167.84	0.01	0	0.01
2016-2017 (Actual)	897.48	337.41	1234.89	0.01	0	0.01
2017-2018 (Actual)	615.36	260.54	875.89	0	0	0.01
2018-2019 (Actual)	574.65	57.66	632.31	0	0	0
2019-2020 (Revised Estimates)	511.18	12.23	523.41	0	0	0
2020-2021 (Budget Estimates)	637.73	23.80	661.53	0	0	0

Source: Ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India.

The data in Table 1 on public expenditure on adult education in India from 2005-2006 to 2020-2021 highlights a mixed pattern of spending and its relative insignificance in terms of GDP allocation. Total expenditure increased from Rs. 396.16 crores in 2005-2006 to Rs. 661.53 crores in 2020-2021, with states/UTs contributing a larger share over time. While the Centre's contribution declined from Rs. 243.46 crores in 2005-2006 to Rs. 23.8 crores in 2020-2021, the states/UTs showed an upward trend until 2016-2017, peaking at Rs. 897.48 crores, but declined thereafter. Expenditure as a percentage of GDP remained stagnant at 0.01% or less, underscoring its limited fiscal priority. The decline in total spending after 2016-2017, coupled with the Centre's reduced involvement, raises concerns about the emphasis on adult education in public policy. The marginal allocation and lack of consistent growth suggest a need for renewed focus to ensure the sustainability and impact of adult education initiatives. Despite increases in absolute figures during certain periods, the overall allocation remains insufficient to reflect a significant commitment for addressing adult literacy and lifelong learning challenges.



Impact of Key Programmes and Initiatives

The analysis of fund allocations under the New India Literacy Programme (NILP) from 2019-2020 to 2023-2024 reveals dynamic shifts in resource distribution aimed at enhancing literacy nationwide. With varying annual disbursements, ranging from foundational phases to substantial commitments in subsequent years, the programme reflects evolving governmental priorities and strategic interventions across states and union territories (UTs). These allocations underscore the importance of adaptive policies and effective implementation strategies to address diverse educational challenges and achieve sustained progress in literacy and educational development goals throughout India (Shankar & Kidd, 2022).

In India, initiatives like *Padhna Likhna Abhiyan* (PLA) and the *New India Literacy Programme* (NILP) have played crucial roles in promoting literacy. PLA, launched in 2021-2022 with an initial allocation of Rs. 2.1 crores, focused on improving basic literacy skills among targeted populations. NILP received Rs. 7,742.76 lakhs in 2020-2021 and Rs. 6,624.52 lakhs in 2022-2023, indicating fluctuations in funding over the years. These variations suggest shifts in policy emphasis and resource allocation, underscoring the importance of sustained investment to achieve long-term literacy goals.

Table 2: Budget Allocations, Net of Recoveries and Plan Outlay for Ministry of Education (Department of School Education and Literacy) in India (2021-2022 to 2023-2024)

(Rs. in Crores)												
Particulars	2021-2022 (Actual)			2022-2023 (Budget)			2022-2023 (Revised)			2023-2024 (Budget)		
	Revenue	Capital	Total	Revenue	Capital	Total	Revenue	Capital	Total	Revenue	Capital	Total
Directorate of Adult Education	2.17	-	2.17	3	-	3	3	-	3	3	-	3
Teachers Training and Adult Education												
Padhna Likhna Abhiyan	2.1	-	2.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
New India Literacy Programme (NILP)	-	-	-	127	-	127	100	-	100	-	-	-
Total- Teachers Training and Adult Education	2.1	-	2.1	127	-	127	100	-	100	-	-	-
New India Literacy Programme (NILP)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	157	-	157
ASPIRE (Accelerating State Education Program to Improve Results)	-	-	-	600	-	600	0.01	-	0.01	-	-	-

Source: Budget Documents, Ministry of Finance, Govt. of India.

The budget data in Table 2 for the Ministry of Home Affairs' Department of School Education and Literacy from 2021-2022 to 2023-2024 reveals inconsistencies in allocations for adult education programmes. The Directorate of Adult Education maintained a steady but limited allocation of Rs. 3 crores annually from 2022-2023. The discontinuation of the *Padhna Likhna Abhiyan* after 2021-2022 indicates a shift in policy focus. The *New India Literacy Programme* (NILP) received Rs. 127 crores in 2022-2023, later revised to Rs. 100 crores, before being discontinued in 2023-2024 and subsequently reintroduced with Rs. 157 crores. *ASPIRE* saw a peak allocation of Rs. 600 crores in 2022-2023 but was later significantly reduced. These fluctuations suggest an inconsistent commitment to adult education, raising concerns about the sustainability and prioritization of literacy initiatives.

Table 3: Budget Allocation under Various Schemes by Ministry of Education in India (2019-2020 to 2023-2024)

(*Rs. in Crores*)					
Schemes	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Adult Education & Skill Development	75.4	10	250	127	157

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 3043, dated 20.03.2023.

Table 3, which presents the budget allocation for adult education and skill development under the Ministry of Education, shows significant fluctuations between 2019-2020 and 2023-2024. Starting at Rs. 75.4 crores in 2019-2020, the allocation dropped sharply to Rs. 10 crores in 2020-2021 before surging to Rs. 250 crores in 2021-2022.

With the introduction of the *New India Literacy Programme* (NILP) in 2022-2023, funding was set at Rs. 127 crores and later increased to Rs. 157 crores in 2023-2024. These shifts indicate evolving priorities, with a renewed focus on literacy programmes in recent years, highlighting the government's effort to enhance adult education and skill development.

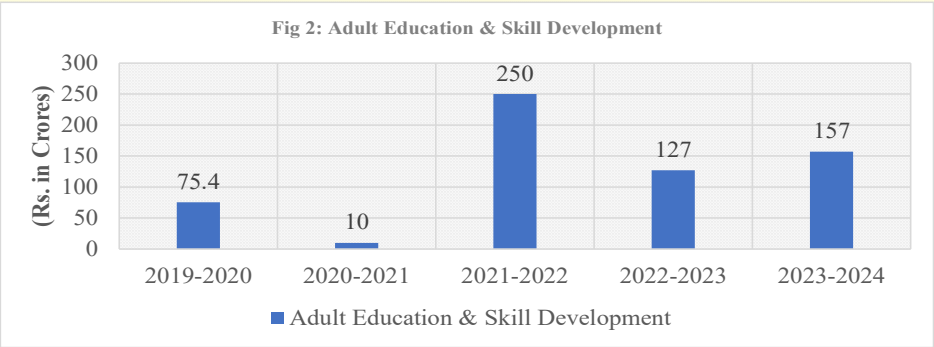


Table 4: State-wise Funds Released under New India Literacy Programme (NILP) in India (2019-2020 to 2023-2024)

(*Rs. in Lakh*)					
States/UTs	2019-2020	2020-2021 (PLA)	2021-2022	2022-2023 (NILP)	2023-2024
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	0	94.5	0	39.54	0
Andhra Pradesh	0	444.6	0	384.51	0
Arunachal Pradesh	0	113.38	0	64.72	0
Assam	0	326.25	0	827.17	0
Bihar	0	578	0	0	1579.06
Chandigarh	0	95	0	61.63	0
Chhattisgarh	0	351	0	0	0
Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu	0	116.5	0	51.81	0
Delhi	0	43.8	0	72.95	0
Goa	0	0	0	16.71	0
Gujarat	0	217.8	0	380.05	0
Haryana	0	150.6	0	170.26	0
Himachal Pradesh	0	225.9	0	0	0
Jammu & Kashmir	0	105.3	0	0	0
Jharkhand	0	284	0	268.46	0
Karnataka	0	444.6	0	444.32	0
Kerala	0	284.23	0	89.92	0
Ladakh	0	51	0	112.67	0
Lakshadweep	0	32.06	0	24.89	0
Madhya Pradesh	0	445	0	491.63	0
Maharashtra	0	0	0	567.52	0
Manipur	0	113.4	0	82.39	0
Meghalaya	0	113.4	0	89.35	0
Mizoram	0	85.49	0	29.49	0
Nagaland	0	113.4	0	81.98	0
Odisha	0	284	0	322.02	0
Puducherry	0	75.57	0	0	0
Punjab	0	70.2	0	192.58	0
Rajasthan	0	578.28	0	505.03	0
Sikkim	0	45.9	0	37.8	0
Tamil Nadu	0	431.4	0	590.05	0
Telangana	0	310.8	0	0	0
Tripura	0	113.4	0	108.1	0
Uttar Pradesh	0	578	0	313.8	0
Uttarakhand	0	426	0	203.17	0
West Bengal	0	0	0	0	0
India (Total)	0	7742.76	0	6624.52	1579.06

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 594, dated 24.07.2023.

Table 4, which details state-wise funds released under the *New India Literacy Programme* (NILP) from 2019-2020 to 2023-2024, reveals significant disparities and varying levels of engagement among states and union territories. While no funds were allocated in 2019-2020 and 2021-2022, allocations surged under NILP in 2022-2023, with Assam, Bihar, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Madhya Pradesh receiving substantial amounts. However, in 2023-2024, Bihar was the sole state to receive funds, amounting to Rs. 1,579.06 lakhs. This uneven distribution indicates shifting priorities and suggests a focus on targeted areas rather than uniform implementation. The absence of funding for many states in certain years reflects inconsistencies in execution, raising questions about the equitable rollout and sustainability of the programme. The data underscores the need for a balanced approach to ensure comprehensive literacy development across all regions.

Section B: Challenges in Financial Investments and Correlation Between Expenditure and Literacy Rates

Financial investments in adult education in India have faced persistent challenges, with inconsistent funding patterns, inefficient resource allocation, and inadequate private sector participation limiting the sector's impact. Despite policy commitments, expenditure on adult education has remained a negligible portion of GDP, reflecting its low fiscal priority. While states and union territories have gradually increased their contributions, central funding has declined significantly over the years, leading to a fragmented financial landscape. Budget fluctuations, as seen in the sharp reduction of allocations after 2016-17, have disrupted programme continuity and affected the sustainability of key initiatives. Programmes such as the *New India Literacy Programme* have attempted to revitalize the sector, but inconsistent funding and policy shifts have hindered their long-term effectiveness.

One of the most pressing issues is the inefficient utilization of allocated funds. Bureaucratic delays, lack of coordination between central and state governments, and overlapping schemes have led to resource misallocation. The absence of robust monitoring mechanisms further exacerbates the problem, making it difficult to track expenditure and measure the effectiveness of financial investments. Regional disparities in funding allocation have also resulted in uneven access to adult education, with some states receiving substantial financial support while others remain underserved. The withdrawal of central funding in recent years has left many states struggling to sustain adult education programmes, highlighting the need for a more coordinated financial strategy.

The correlation between public expenditure on adult education and literacy rates reveals the limitations of existing financial investments. While increased funding has led to improvements in literacy levels in some states, the overall impact remains inconsistent due to inefficiencies in programme implementation. States that have received higher funding, such as Bihar and Rajasthan, have shown progress in literacy rates, but the absence of sustained investment has slowed long-term gains. In contrast, states with lower allocations have struggled to improve adult literacy, underscoring the need for equitable and sustained financial support. The lack of direct linkage between funding and learning outcomes further weakens the case for increased investment, as policymakers often prioritize other education sectors with more immediate measurable returns.

A more structured approach to financial investments is essential to ensure that resources are effectively utilized and contribute to measurable literacy improvements. Performance-based financing models, which tie funding to learning outcomes, could help enhance efficiency and accountability. Increased private sector engagement through public-private partnerships and targeted CSR initiatives can also supplement government efforts and provide alternative funding sources. Expanding digital education and leveraging technology-driven solutions could reduce costs and increase accessibility, particularly for underserved communities. By addressing inefficiencies in fund utilization, ensuring equitable allocation, and adopting innovative financial models, India can create a more effective and sustainable adult education system that contributes to long-term socio-economic development.

Section C: Strategic Recommendations for Optimizing Financial Investments

Optimizing financial investments in adult education requires a multi-faceted approach that prioritizes increased funding, strategic partnerships, technological integration, and robust accountability measures. The government must allocate a greater share of the education budget to adult learning programmes, ensuring sustained financial support for infrastructure, teacher training, and innovative learning methods. Without consistent funding, initiatives risk losing momentum, limiting their long-term impact. A higher budgetary commitment would enable the expansion of literacy programmes, skill development courses, and digital learning platforms, ensuring greater accessibility for underserved communities.

Public-private partnerships can play a transformative role in enhancing resource availability and programme quality. Offering tax incentives, grants, and formal recognition for corporate involvement in adult education could encourage greater private sector participation. Leveraging private expertise in curriculum development,

digital learning solutions, and vocational training could complement government efforts and introduce more efficient financial management models. Successful collaboration between the government and industry stakeholders would also facilitate workforce oriented learning programmes, directly linking adult education to employability and economic growth.

Technology-driven solutions can significantly reduce costs while expanding the reach of adult education initiatives. Investing in digital platforms, mobile-based learning tools, and AI-driven personalized education models could bridge accessibility gaps, particularly in remote and rural areas. Online learning resources and community based digital literacy programmes could provide flexible learning opportunities for adults who cannot attend traditional classes. The integration of technology into adult education financing models would also enable cost-effective scalability, ensuring a wider impact with limited resources.

Ensuring efficient fund utilization requires a strong monitoring and evaluation framework. Establishing transparent tracking mechanisms for financial disbursement, programme performance, and learner outcomes would improve accountability and enhance decision-making. Data-driven policy adjustments would help redirect resources to areas with the highest need, preventing fund misallocation and inefficiencies. Performance-based financing models, linking funding to measurable outcomes such as literacy improvement, employment rates, and skill acquisition, could further enhance efficiency by prioritizing impact-driven investments.

Community engagement is crucial in sustaining adult education programmes and ensuring their relevance to local needs. Actively involving community leaders, educators, and learners in programme design and execution would foster greater participation and ownership. Decentralized decision-making, supported by local governance structures would facilitate effective fund allocation based on region specific educational gaps. Encouraging grassroots initiatives and self-help learning groups could supplement formal adult education programmes, making financial investments more impactful.

Diversifying funding sources beyond government budgets would strengthen the financial sustainability of adult education initiatives. Corporate social responsibility contributions, international grants, and philanthropic funding could provide additional resources, reducing dependency on public funds. Collaborative financing models, where multiple stakeholders contribute to adult education development, would in turn create a more resilient funding structure capable of withstanding budget fluctuations.

Lessons from past initiatives highlight both the potential and challenges of adult education financing. The *Saakshar Bharat Mission* demonstrated the effectiveness of community mobilization but faced hurdles in fund disbursement and programme scalability. Kerala's literacy campaign showcased the importance of sustained political commitment, local participation, and strategic resource utilization in achieving high literacy rates. Global best practices, particularly from Finland and Germany, emphasize long-term financial planning, institutional support, and integration of lifelong learning into national development strategies. Adopting similar evidence-based approaches could help India strengthen its financial investments in adult education, ensuring inclusive and sustainable learning opportunities for all.

Section D: Discussion & Conclusion

A well-structured financial strategy for adult education in India must align with broader national policies to ensure long-term impact. Integrating adult education within the framework of the *National Education Policy* (NEP) 2020 can provide a cohesive approach to lifelong learning, linking literacy initiatives with skill development and employability programmes. NEP 2020 emphasizes inclusive and flexible learning pathways, recognizing the need for digital education, vocational training, and community-based learning models. Aligning financial investments with these priorities can create a more structured and outcome-driven approach to adult education, ensuring that resources are utilized efficiently and equitably.

The role of multiple stakeholders in optimizing financial investments is crucial. Policymakers must ensure sustained public funding and create regulatory frameworks that encourage private sector participation. Educators and training institutions need to adapt to evolving learning needs, incorporating technology-driven solutions to enhance accessibility and engagement. The private sector, including corporate social responsibility initiatives and philanthropic organizations, can provide financial support, expertise, and infrastructure to strengthen adult education programmes. Collaborative efforts between the government, industry, and civil society can lead to innovative financing models that reduce dependency on public funds while increasing the reach and effectiveness of education initiatives.

A long-term vision for adult education financing is essential for achieving India's socio-economic development goals. Sustainable investments in adult education contribute to human capital development, reducing unemployment, improving productivity, and fostering social inclusion. A financial strategy that prioritizes continuous funding, accountability, and performance-based financing can ensure

that adult education programmes evolve with changing economic and technological landscapes. Strengthening monitoring mechanisms and establishing clear benchmarks for success can enhance the effectiveness of financial investments, ensuring measurable improvements in literacy rates and skill acquisition.

Streamlining financial investments in adult education is critical to addressing literacy and skill gaps across the country. By increasing budgetary allocations, promoting multi-stakeholder partnerships, leveraging digital learning technologies, and ensuring robust financial accountability, India can create a more resilient and inclusive adult education system. A well-coordinated approach involving government agencies, private organizations, and local communities is necessary to unlock the full potential of adult education. With strategic investments and policy coherence, India can move closer to achieving universal literacy, economic empowerment, and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 34-47
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00003.8
ISSN 0019-5006

Women's Lifelong Education: A New Dawn in Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract

The landscape of women's education in Jammu and Kashmir is undergoing a significant transformation, heralded by the emergence of lifelong learning initiatives. This paper explores the pivotal role of continuous education in empowering women within this region. By examining various lifelong learning programmes and their impacts, the study highlights how these educational opportunities contribute to personal growth, economic independence, and social development. Through case studies and qualitative analysis, the paper underscores the challenges and successes faced by women engaging in lifelong learning. It also makes a comparative analysis of lifelong learning initiatives between the pre-abrogation and post- abrogation period of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir. This research aims to shed light on the transformative power of lifelong education and advocate for its broader implementation, as a means to uplift and empower women in Jammu and Kashmir.

Keywords: *Lifelong learning, women, Jammu and Kashmir, empowerment, programmes, development.*

I. Introduction

Education fosters a sense of self-efficacy and personal growth, enabling women to challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. The acquisition of new skills and knowledge broadens their horizons and expands their potential, allowing them achieve more significant goals and this in a way leads to their empowerment (Merriam and Bierema, 2013). Women empowerment is a critical aspect of human development, and education is a fundamental right that enables individuals to achieve their full potential. In India, women constitute approximately 48% of the population (Census, 2011), yet they face numerous challenges that hinder their empowerment. Limited access to education and skill development opportunities perpetuates gender disparities, confining women to low-paying jobs, and reinforcing their dependence on others

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(Kabeer, 2005). Lifelong learning has emerged as a vital strategy for human capital development, economic growth, and social empowerment (OECD, 2019). By enabling individuals to acquire new skills and knowledge throughout their lives, it can help women overcome the constraints of traditional education systems and societal norms (UNESCO, 2017).

In India, where gender inequality is deeply ingrained, lifelong learning can be a powerful tool for women empowerment, enabling them to challenge existing power structures and demand their rights (Nayak, 2017). Lifelong learning extends beyond formal education to include non-formal and informal modes of learning. For women in India, lifelong learning is crucial as it provides opportunities for continuous personal and professional growth, adapting to changing socio-economic environments (UNESCO, 2015). In a country where gender disparities have historically limited women's opportunities, lifelong learning serves as a catalyst for societal transformation, enabling women to break barriers and achieve their full potential. Lifelong learning initiatives address the gaps by offering adult education programmes, vocational training and skill development courses tailored to the needs of women.

One of the most significant impacts of lifelong learning on women's empowerment is economic independence. Education and skill development enhance women's employability, enabling them to secure better-paying jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities. According to the World Bank, educated women are more likely to participate in the labor force and earn higher incomes, which can lead to improved living standards for their families (World Bank, 2018). Lifelong learning programmes empower women by enhancing their employability through vocational training in fields such as technology, healthcare, hospitality, and agriculture. By acquiring relevant skills and certifications, women can access better job opportunities, negotiate for fair wages, and contribute more effectively to their households' income. Beyond economic empowerment, lifelong learning challenges societal norms and stereotypes that restrict women's roles and aspirations. Education empowers women to challenge discriminatory practices such as child marriage, gender-based violence, and unequal access to resources. It encourages critical thinking and advocacy skills, enabling women to become leaders and change agents within their communities.

Lifelong learning also promotes awareness of women's rights and legal protection, equipping women with knowledge to assert their rights and seek justice in cases of abuse or discrimination. Access to health education and information is another critical aspect of lifelong learning for women's empowerment in India. Many women in rural and underserved areas lack basic knowledge about reproductive health, hygiene

practices, and disease prevention (WHO, 2019). Several initiatives across the world, demonstrate the impact of lifelong learning on women's lives. For instance, the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh has been instrumental in providing microcredit to women, enabling them to start their businesses and invest in their education. This initiative has transformed the lives of many women, lifting them out of poverty and empowering them to become active economic contributors (Yunus, 2007). Similarly, the Open University in the United Kingdom offers flexible learning opportunities, allowing women to pursue higher education while managing their personal and professional responsibilities. This has enabled many women to attain degrees and advance their careers, contributing to gender equality in the workforce (Open University, 2020).

Historically, women in India have faced significant barriers to education. Social norms and cultural practices often relegated women to domestic roles, limiting their access to formal education. However, the post-independence era saw a gradual shift with the implementation of policies aimed at promoting gender equality in education. The National Policy on Education, 1986, and subsequent amendments emphasized the need for increasing female literacy rates and ensuring access to education for girls and women (NCERT, 2005). So, this paper explores the significance of lifelong learning for women's empowerment in Jammu and Kashmir, examining its impact on various aspects of their lives, including economic independence, social status, health and peace of mind.

II. Research Methodology

Research Design:

- The study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative data.
- The study has used a survey research method to collect quantitative data, and semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data.

Sample Size and Population:

- The study targeted women aged between 18-60 years in urban and rural areas of India.
- A sample size of 500 women was selected using stratified random sampling.
- The sample was divided into two groups: women who have participated in lifelong learning programmes and women who have not.

Data Collection Methods:

- Survey questionnaire: A structured questionnaire was developed to collect data on demographics, education, employment, and lifelong learning experiences. Survey questionnaires were administered through online platforms and in-person interviews.
- Semi-structured interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with 20 women from each group to gather data on their experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to lifelong learning. These were conducted in-person or via online medium.

Data Analysis Methods:

- Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics (t-test, ANOVA).
- Qualitative data was analyzed using thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations:

- Informed consent was obtained from all participants.
- Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured.
- Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board.

III. Public Programmes and Results

Jammu and Kashmir, a region with a complex socio-political landscape, has witnessed significant challenges in its developmental trajectory. The region's unique cultural heritage, coupled with prolonged periods of conflict and instability, has influenced various aspects of life, including education and women's rights. Traditional norms and patriarchal values have often restricted women's access to education and economic opportunities. However, recent efforts by government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and community groups have started to address these disparities by promoting lifelong learning as a means of empowerment.

UMEED SCHEME under JKSRLM

Background: The UMEED scheme, part of the Jammu and Kashmir State Rural Livelihoods Mission (JKSRLM), aims to improve the socio-economic status of rural women by providing them with vocational training, skill development, and financial

inclusion opportunities (Department of Rural Development JK, 2021). One of the respondents named Zarina Khan informed that group of women from the Anantnag district formed a Self-Help Group (SHG) under the UMEED scheme. These women received training in traditional crafts like pashmina weaving and embroidery. With the skills acquired, they began producing high-quality handmade products. The scheme also facilitated access to micro-credit, allowing them to purchase raw materials and expand their business. The women leveraged digital platforms to market their products, reaching a wider audience. As a result, their incomes increased significantly, and they gained financial independence. The success of this SHG inspired other women in the community to join similar programmes, fostering a culture of entrepreneurship and self-reliance.

The Saakshar Bharat Mission

This Mission focuses on improving literacy rates among adults, particularly women, in rural areas. The mission implements various educational programmes to enhance basic literacy and numeracy skills. In the remote village of Kulgam, many women had never attended school due to socio-economic constraints and conflict related disruptions. An adult literacy center was established under the Saakshar Bharat Mission, providing evening classes for women. Shahnaza Banoo, a 38- year-old woman, was enrolled in the programme. Over several months, she learned to read, write, and perform basic arithmetic skills. With her newfound skills, Shahnaza took control of her family's finances and launched a small tailoring business from home. Her literacy not only enhanced her economic situation but also elevated her self-esteem and social standing in the community. Shahnaza's journey underscores the life-changing impact of adult education, inspiring other women to seek opportunities for learning.

Digital Literacy Initiative by Digital India

The Digital India campaign aims to bridge the digital divide by promoting internet connectivity and digital literacy among rural populations, including women.

In the village of Anantnag, a digital literacy center was established to provide women with basic computer skills. Shaista Akhtar, a young woman with limited formal education, enrolled in the programme. She learned how to use a computer, navigate the internet, and access online educational resources. Her digital literacy opened the door to online graphic design courses, and with her newly acquired skills, she began offering freelance design services. Through online platforms, she was able to connect with clients from all over the country. Shaista's success demonstrated

the potential of digital literacy to open up new economic opportunities for women in rural areas. Her achievements inspired other young women in the village to embrace digital learning, creating a ripple effect of empowerment.

Quantitative Results

1. UMEED scheme under JKSRLM

Annual Income Increase:
Women participating in *UMEED* have reported an average annual income increase of 30% to 50% after receiving vocational training.

Self-Help Group Earnings:
Self-Help Groups (SHGs) formed under *UMEED* have seen their collective earnings increased from an average of Rs. 10,000 ($135) per year to Rs. 50,000 ($675) per year.

Entrepreneurship Outcomes:
Women entrepreneurs trained under *UMEED* have reported that the monthly earnings of small businesses range from Rs. 5,000 ($67) to Rs. 15,000 ($202).

2. Women's Development Corporation (WDC) Initiatives

Background: The Women's Development Corporation (WDC) focuses on providing skill development and vocational training to promote self-employment and entrepreneurship among women. Its creation came at a time when there was a growing recognition of the need to address gender inequality and provide women with better opportunities for growth and empowerment. (JK WDC,1991).

Income Growth: Women who underwent training in food processing, tailoring, and handicrafts through WDC initiatives experienced an income increase from Rs. 2,000 ($27) per month to Rs. 8,000 ($108) per month.

Employment Opportunities: Approximately 60% of the women trained by WDC secured employment or started their own businesses, resulting in increased household income by an average of Rs. 6,000 ($81) per month. (Shaista et al., 2024)

3. Saakshar Bharat Mission (Adult Literacy Programme)

Background: The Saakshar Bharat Mission aims to improve literacy rates among adults, particularly women, in rural areas.

Economic Empowerment: Women who completed literacy programmes reported a 25% increase in their ability to manage household finances and engage in income-generating activities.

Enhanced Livelihoods: Literacy programme graduates involved in small-scale businesses, such as tailoring and local trade, saw their monthly income rise from Rs. 1,500 ($20) to Rs. 5,000 ($67)

4. Digital Literacy Initiatives *(Digital India)*

Background: The Digital India campaign aims to bridge the digital divide by promoting internet connectivity and digital literacy among rural populations, including women.

Income from Online Work: Women who completed digital literacy training and pursued online freelance work, such as graphic design or data entry, reported average monthly earnings of Rs. 10,000 ($135).

Business Expansion: Small business owners who learned digital marketing skills experienced a revenue increase of 40% by accessing broader markets online.

5. NGO-Driven Skill Development Programmes

Background: Various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Jammu and Kashmir run skill development programmes to empower women through education and training.

Tailoring and Stitching Programmes: Women trained in tailoring and stitching reported an increase in their monthly earnings from Rs. 1,800 ($24) to Rs. 7,000 ($94).

Handicraft Programmes: Participants in handicraft programmes saw their annual incomes rise from Rs. 15,000 ($202) to Rs. 60,000 ($808) after receiving training and market access support.

These figures highlight the significant impact of lifelong learning initiatives on the incomes of women in Jammu and Kashmir. Through vocational training, adult literacy programmes, digital literacy initiatives, and support from organizations like the Women's Development Corporation and NGOs, women have been able to achieve substantial income growth, enhancing their economic independence and overall quality of life (Women's Global Fund, 2022). Tejaswini scheme that was launched in June 2021, offers financial assistance for young women to start self-employment ventures. Women like Saira Akram Dar from Pulwama started a tailoring business with the help of Rs. 5 lakh sanctioned as loan, significantly increasing her family's income and employing several local women. Similarly, SAATH - a mentoring programme aims to make rural women self-reliant by helping them set up and sustain enterprises (Business Standard, 2021). Participants have reported significant increases in their income through ventures like dairy farming and small-scale manufacturing, transforming their overall socio-economic status.

IV. Comparative Analysis of Lifelong Learning Initiatives in Pre-Abrogation and Post-Abrogation Period of Article 370

Case 1: Pre-Abrogation of Article 370

Title: Empowering Women through Handicraft Training Programmes

Background: Before the abrogation of Article 370, the region of Jammu and Kashmir faced several socio-political challenges that hindered development initiatives. However, various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil societies actively worked to promote women's education and vocational training. An NGO launched a comprehensive handicraft training programme for women in rural areas of Kashmir. The programme aimed to preserve traditional crafts while providing women with skills that could lead to financial independence.

Implementation: Training centers were established in various villages to provide easy access for women, offering a curriculum focused on traditional crafts such as carpet weaving, embroidery, and papier-mâché. Participants were supported with raw materials and marketing assistance to help them sell their products. As a result, over 500 women received training, and many went on to start their own small businesses or cooperatives. This initiative not only led to economic empowerment, but also boosted the women's self-confidence and earned them increased respect within their communities. Additionally, the initiative attracted tourists and buyers, ensuring a sustainable income for the participants (Khan, 2018).

Case 2: Post-Abrogation of Article 370

Title: Digital Literacy and Entrepreneurship Training for Women

Background: The abrogation of Article 370 in August 2019 led to significant political and administrative changes in Jammu and Kashmir. The region opened up to new opportunities for development and integration with national schemes. A collaboration between the government and a prominent tech company NASSCOM foundation launched a digital literacy and entrepreneurship training programme for women in urban and semi-urban areas (The Hindu, 2020)

Implementation: Digital literacy workshops were organized to teach women essential skills such as basic computer usage, internet navigation, and digital marketing. In addition, entrepreneurship training provided valuable knowledge on starting and managing online businesses, including e-commerce platforms. To support the participants, small grants were offered, and women were connected with mentors who helped them develop business plans and navigate the market. As a result, over 1,000 women enrolled in the program in its first year. Many went on to launch successful online businesses, selling products from handmade crafts to local agricultural produce. The initiative also fostered a supportive network among women entrepreneurs, promoting collaborative ventures and contributing to community growth (Raina, 2020).

Case 3: Pre-Abrogation of Article 370

Title: Women's Literacy Campaign in Rural Jammu

Before the abrogation of Article 370, efforts to promote women's literacy in rural areas of Jammu faced numerous challenges, including cultural resistance and limited infrastructure. A local NGO SHE HOPE initiated a women's literacy campaign aimed at teaching basic reading and writing skills to women in remote villages.

Implementation & Outcome: Mobile learning centers were established through mobile units to reach various villages. Local volunteers were recruited as teachers, and free learning materials such as books and stationery were provided to the participants. The initiative faced several challenges, including cultural resistance, as many families were reluctant to allow women to participate due to traditional gender roles. Additionally, logistical issues with the mobile units made it difficult to reach all the intended areas. High dropout rates were observed, with women often prioritizing

household duties over attending classes. Ultimately, the initiative reached fewer than 100 women, and only a small number achieved basic literacy, leading to the program's eventual discontinuation (Gupta, 2017).

Case 4: Post-Abrogation of Article 370

Title: Women's Digital Literacy Program in Jammu

Post-abrogation, increased governmental focus on Digital India initiatives and infrastructural development opened new avenues for women's education in Jammu and Kashmir.

The government, in collaboration with a national NGO, launched a women's digital literacy program to teach computer and internet skills to women in rural areas.

Implementation & Outcome: Digital learning centers were established with permanent facilities, fully equipped with computers and internet access. Skilled professional trainers were hired to ensure high-quality education, while flexible class timings were offered to accommodate the women's schedules. The program also provided follow-up support and advanced courses to encourage continuous learning. Within the first six months, over 1,500 women enrolled in the program. The women applied their new digital skills in various areas, such as online banking, accessing government services, and starting small online businesses. The initiative had a significant impact on the community, as women shared their newfound knowledge, leading to greater overall digital literacy. The program was later expanded to additional villages, achieving a completion rate of over 75% (Sharma, 2021).

To draw a comparative analysis - before the abrogation, focus was on traditional skills, primarily serving local markets, with a community-based approach that lacked significant technological integration. Successes were mostly localized due to sociopolitical constraints. In contrast, after the abrogation, the initiative leveraged digital technology and national programs, allowing for a broader market reach through ecommerce. Greater government support and national integration further facilitated a larger-scale impact, expanding the program's influence and accessibility. These case studies illustrate how changing socio-political environments and strategic partnerships can significantly impact the success of lifelong learning initiatives for women's empowerment. Pre-abrogation efforts were often hindered by instability and resistance, while post-abrogation programmes benefited from improved stability, infrastructure, and support.

V. Lifelong Learning and Promotion of Peace in Jammu and Kashmir

Lifelong learning has played a critical role in promoting peace and stability in Jammu and Kashmir by addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering an environment of understanding, empowerment, and economic development. Here are several ways in which lifelong learning has contributed to peacebuilding in the region:

The UMEED scheme, which is part of the JKSRLM, has empowered women by providing vocational training and financial inclusion. Economic independence reduces reliance on conflict-driven economies and creates a stake in maintaining peace. Women who are economically empowered tend to invest in their family's education and health, leading to overall social stability. This contributes to a peaceful environment as family becomes self-sufficient and less vulnerable to external pressures. For example, in Badgam, women who participated in the UMEED scheme reported increased household incomes, which reduced economic strain and fostered a more stable and peaceful community (Nigheena, Khan, personal communication, 15 March 2024). Similarly, the Saakshar Bharat Mission focused on adult literacy, which has empowered women to engage actively in their communities. Literacy improves communication and understanding, reducing misunderstandings and conflicts. Educated women are more likely to participate in community decision-making processes, promoting democratic values and peaceful conflict resolution. In Shopian, women who completed literacy programmes have taken on leadership roles in local community organizations, promoting peace and development initiatives.

Digital literacy programmes under the Digital India campaign have provided women with access to information and communication technologies. This access helps women stay informed about their rights and available opportunities, reducing the likelihood of conflict over misinformation. The digital platforms facilitate the creation of online communities where women can share experiences, support each other, and collectively advocate for peace and stability. In Anantnag, women who gained digital literacy skills have created online groups to discuss community issues and coordinate peaceful initiatives, enhancing social cohesion.

Various NGOs in Jammu and Kashmir run educational programmes focusing on peace education, conflict resolution, and human rights. These programmes teach women and their families the importance of peace and specific skills needed to resolve conflicts non-violently. The programmes that promote cultural exchange and understanding between different communities help break down prejudices and

build mutual respect. The NGO Chinar Kashmir has implemented programmes that include peace education modules. Women who participated in these programmes have become advocates for non-violence and reconciliation in their communities (Khan, 2022).

Lifelong learning initiatives have significantly contributed to promoting peace in Jammu and Kashmir by empowering women economically, fostering community engagement, building capacities for conflict resolution, promoting education and awareness, and reducing vulnerability to radicalization. These programmes create a foundation for a more stable and peaceful society by addressing the socio-economic and cultural factors that drive conflict. Through continued support and expansion of lifelong learning opportunities, the region can move closer to sustained peace and development.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, lifelong learning is a powerful tool for women empowerment, enabling women to free themselves from the shackles of oppression, challenge gender stereotypes and unlock their full potential. It is clear that by investing in lifelong learning we can empower women to shape their own destinies, challenge the status quo and create a justifiable and equitable world for themselves as well as future generations. The study's findings suggest that lifelong learning programmes have a positive impact on women's empowerment in India, leading to increased confidence, economic independence, social recognition and personal growth. These findings are consistent with previous research that has highlighted the importance of education and skills development in promoting women's empowerment (Kabeer, 2005).

The study's results have several implications for policy and practice. Firstly, the findings suggest that investing in lifelong learning programmes can be an effective strategy for promoting women's empowerment in India. Secondly, the study highlights the need for gender-sensitive approaches to lifelong learning, that take into account the unique challenges and barriers faced by women in accessing education and skills development opportunities. Finally, the study emphasizes the importance of addressing the social and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality and limit women's access to lifelong learning opportunities. The study's limitations include its focus on a specific region in India. Future research should aim to address these limitations by using objective measures of empowerment and expanding the study's scope to include other regions in India.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 48-65
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00004.X
ISSN 0019-5006

Threads of Change: A Lifelong Learning Strategy for Women's Entrepreneurial Empowerment in the Weaving Sector of Ri-Bhoi District, Meghalaya

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Abstract

The research study investigates the critical role of lifelong learning in facilitating the entrepreneurial transformation of weaving artisans in the Ri-Bhoi District of Meghalaya, a region known for its traditional weaving practices. The weaving artisans, face significant economic and infrastructural challenges that prevent them from fully leveraging their craft for economic gain. By integrating lifelong learning, this study aims to empower artisans to transition from subsistence weavers into successful entrepreneurs, thereby fostering sustainable livelihoods and preserving traditional practices. The study focuses on key determinants that address both individual motivations and systemic challenges faced by the artisans in their entrepreneurial journey. The objective of the research was to identify the motivational factors that drive artisans toward entrepreneurship. While financial gain is important, many artisans are also motivated by the desire to preserve their cultural heritage and achieve self-reliance. Understanding these motivations is critical for designing effective educational programs that support their entrepreneurial growth. The entrepreneurs face the challenges such as geographical isolation, the resources, limited digital literacy, and restricted access to broader markets, infrastructural problems, knowledge to promote their products, limited access to policy support, training, marketing and consultancy services. These challenges prevent artisans from scaling their businesses. The study tries to address these gaps and highlights the importance of lifelong learning programs, which offer continuous skill development and entrepreneurial training. Such programs are vital in helping artisans navigate these obstacles and build successful enterprises. This research evaluates the effectiveness of existing government programs in providing resources, training, and financial aid. By identifying gaps in governmental support, the study offers recommendations to improve policies that better align with the

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needs of artisans in the region. Finally, the study investigates the success of certain weaving units through the application of entrepreneurial strategies. These strategies, which focus on innovation, customer engagement, and product differentiation, have enabled some artisans to thrive. By analysing these successful activities, the research provides insights that other artisans can adopt to replicate similar business achievements. The study proposes that marketing skills—integrated into lifelong learning programs—can help artisans utilize e-commerce, digital platforms, and branding strategies to reach national and international markets. In conclusion, this research highlights the pivotal role of lifelong learning in addressing the challenges faced by weaving artisans in the Ri-Bhoi District. By identifying motivational factors, exploring infrastructural and marketing challenges, examining government support, and analysing successful weaving units, the study developed a comprehensive framework for the entrepreneurial transformation of weaving artisans.

Keywords: *Lifelong learning, empowerment, entrepreneurship, weaving, Ri-Bhoi, sustainability, sustainable livelihoods.*

1.0 Introduction

The weaving sector in Meghalaya, particularly in the Ri-Bhoi district, is a cornerstone of the region's cultural heritage, deeply embedded in the traditions of the Khasi community. This craft, more than just a livelihood, represents the identity and artistic expression of the people. Women play a central role in preserving these intricate weaving techniques, passing them down through generations. However, despite their key role, women weavers face significant barriers to realizing their full entrepreneurial potential. Limited access to resources, lack of formal training, and insufficient exposure to modern market opportunities hinder their ability to thrive as entrepreneurs. This study explores the motivational factors that influence the entrepreneurial aspirations of women weavers in Ri-Bhoi. It examines the personal, social, and economic drivers that shape their decision to engage in entrepreneurship and the barriers they encounter. The research underscores the importance of intrinsic motivations, such as the desire for personal growth, financial independence, and the preservation of cultural heritage, in driving women to continue in the weaving sector despite the challenges. In addition, the study identifies key gaps that need addressing, such as limited access to resources, formal training, and opportunities for lifelong learning. Although traditional weaving techniques are passed down through generations, the lack of modern entrepreneurship education restricts women's ability to adapt to changing market dynamics. Without exposure to digital tools, marketing strategies, and business management skills, many weavers struggle to expand their businesses or compete effectively in broader markets.

To address these challenges, the study proposes the "Threads of Change" approach, a lifelong learning strategy aimed at empowering women artisans. This strategy focuses on enhancing both technical skills and entrepreneurial knowledge, incorporating digital literacy and marketing to increase market reach and profitability. By building self-confidence and providing resources to help women access broader markets, the strategy aims to establish sustainable women-led enterprises in the weaving sector. Beyond individual economic empowerment, the research also emphasizes community resilience. Empowering women weavers not only contributes to economic development but also to the preservation of cultural heritage. By positioning women as key agents of socio-economic and cultural transformation, the study aims to strengthen the weaving industry, ensuring its sustainability for future generations. The proposed lifelong learning framework aims to enhance the personal and professional growth of women artisans while preserving the region's rich cultural traditions. This approach promises to empower women, contribute to economic growth, and revitalize the weaving sector for future generations.

1.1 Problem of the Study

This study addresses the challenges faced by women weavers in the Ri-Bhoi district of Meghalaya, where despite their valuable weaving skills and cultural heritage, many struggle to achieve entrepreneurial success. Barriers such as limited access to resources, lack of training, inadequate market knowledge, and financial constraints prevent them from scaling their businesses. The study highlights the need for a strategic framework that focuses on enhancing motivation, skills, and resilience among these women. By providing the tools to innovate, access new markets, and build entrepreneurial confidence, this framework aims to empower women weavers to overcome obstacles while preserving their cultural traditions and achieving sustainable business success.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Threads of Change: A Lifelong Learning Strategy for Women's Entrepreneurial Empowerment in the Weaving Sector of Ri-Bhoi District, Meghalaya seeks to address these issues by exploring motivational factors and proposing a lifelong learning framework to enhance entrepreneurial empowerment and cultural preservation.

1.3 Objectives of The Study

1. To identify the motivational factors for being an entrepreneur in the weaving sector.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What motivates an individual to become an entrepreneur in the weaving sector?

1.5 Hypotheses

The Null Hypotheses below have been formulated:

a) There exist no significant differences in motivational factors for becoming an entrepreneur in the weaving sector based on their:

i. Age
ii. Educational qualification
iii. Economic Status

1.6 Contribution of the Study

This study provides a lifelong learning framework to empower women weavers in Ri-Bhoi district, enhancing their entrepreneurial skills and sustainability. It identifies key motivational factors and contributes to preserving traditional weaving practices. It introduces the "*Threads of Change*" lifelong learning strategy, which emphasizes skill development, confidence-building, and adaptability to empower women artisans and ensure the sustainability of their enterprises. Additionally, it highlights the role of women in preserving traditional weaving practices and positions them as key agents of socio-economic and cultural transformation, fostering community resilience and economic sustainability.

1.7 Conceptual Framework

The study's conceptual framework is based on established motivational theories that offer insights into the driving factors behind entrepreneurship. McClelland's Need for Achievement Theory (1940) is central to the framework, emphasizing that an intrinsic desire for accomplishment and mastery is a powerful motivator for entrepreneurs. This theory suggests that individuals are driven by the need to set and achieve challenging goals, and this motivation can fuel entrepreneurial success. In the context of women weavers in Ri-Bhoi, this theory helps explain their desire to improve their skills, expand their businesses, and gain recognition for their craftsmanship. Hagen's Status Withdrawal Theory (1963) further contributes to the framework by suggesting that individuals often pursue entrepreneurship to improve their social status and gain respect within their community. For women weavers, entrepreneurial success is seen not only as a means of economic independence but also as a way to enhance their social standing, particularly in a society where women may face social and economic constraints. Achieving success in weaving can offer these women a sense of empowerment and respect, both within their communities and beyond. Lastly, Cochran's Model Personality Theory (1965) explores how social factors and personal traits influence entrepreneurial behaviour. This theory

underscores the importance of an individual's social environment, personality traits, and interpersonal relationships in shaping their entrepreneurial intentions and actions. In the case of women weavers, factors such as family support, community dynamics, and personal resilience can all play a crucial role in motivating them to pursue entrepreneurship and overcome challenges.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the motivational dynamics that drive women weavers in Ri-Bhoi to embrace entrepreneurship. They highlight the intrinsic motivations for achievement, the desire for social recognition, and the influence of personal traits and social factors, all of which shape the entrepreneurial journey of women weavers in this region.

2.0 Review of Related Literature

This review focuses on the motivational factors that drive entrepreneurial transformation among weaving artisans in the Ri-Bhoi District of Meghalaya. The role of lifelong learning in addressing these motivational challenges is central to this study, as it emphasizes skill development, entrepreneurial education, and the integration of modern business practices into traditional handicraft industries.

Studies have shown that the motivation for artisans to pursue entrepreneurship is often influenced by their desire to overcome stagnation in their craft. Ghosal and Prasad (2019) and Mohi Ud Din (2010) identify a key motivational factor: the need for artisans to adapt to changing market demands through the adoption of modern marketing and digital tools. These studies suggest that the integration of digital literacy, e-commerce, and online marketing strategies can significantly enhance artisans' entrepreneurial drive by opening new avenues for selling their products globally. This shift not only increases income potential but also motivates artisans to innovate and expand their businesses beyond traditional limits.

In addition to marketing challenges, the lack of awareness of government schemes and institutional support has been identified as a motivational barrier. Purwar (2017) and Chudasri et al. (2012) emphasize that artisans are often unaware of the resources and financial support available to them, which limits their ability to grow their businesses. These studies suggest that motivating artisans to take advantage of these opportunities requires a change in their mindset, facilitated by lifelong learning programs that improve their awareness of governmental resources and enhance their ability to navigate the complexities of accessing these schemes. Entrepreneurial marketing strategies also emerge as a motivational factor for artisans seeking to

differentiate their products. Studies by Shah and Patel (2019) and Kumar and Rajeev (2019) highlight the positive impact of social media and e-commerce platforms on the motivation of artisans to engage with a larger customer base. By adopting innovative marketing strategies, artisans are more likely to see their products as part of a broader entrepreneurial ecosystem, which fuels their desire for business success. The opportunity to build a global brand, driven by product innovation and digital marketing, motivates artisans to view their craft as not just a traditional activity but a sustainable business venture.

Additionally, the need for product innovation and differentiation as a motivational factor is emphasized by Purwar (2017) and Muafi et al. (2012). They argue that the opportunity to cater to niche markets with unique, eco-friendly products encourages artisans to experiment with new designs and materials. This innovation, coupled with digital marketing, not only increases their appeal to modern consumers but also motivates artisans to scale their businesses by entering new markets. In summary, the literature highlights several motivational factors that drive entrepreneurial transformation among weaving artisans. These include the desire for financial independence, the need for recognition in global markets, and the opportunity to innovate and modernize their craft. By addressing these motivations through lifelong learning programs focused on digital literacy, marketing, and product innovation, this study aims to empower artisans in the Ri-Bhoi District to create sustainable, profitable businesses while preserving their cultural heritage.

2.1 Research Gaps

1. Limited Exploration of Gender-Specific Challenges: Limited research on the unique challenges faced by women weavers in Ri-Bhoi, particularly regarding access to resources, decision-making power, and societal expectations.

2. Impact of Traditional vs. Modern Practices on Motivation: A gap in understanding how traditional weaving practices interact with modern business strategies and how this affects artisans' motivation and success.

3. Effectiveness of Lifelong Learning Programs: Insufficient research on how lifelong learning programs specifically impact the entrepreneurial skills, confidence, and resilience of women weavers in Meghalaya.

4. Role of Community and Social Networks in Entrepreneurial Success: Limited exploration of how community networks or artisan cooperatives influence the motivation and success of women weavers in the region.

3.0 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative) with a descriptive design to explore the motivational factors driving entrepreneurship in the weaving sector. It aims to gather artisans' opinions on what motivates them to pursue entrepreneurship. Quantitative data will be analysed using statistical tools like frequencies, mean, standard deviation, and t-tests, while qualitative insights will help further understand these motivations. The survey method is used to collect specific information about the factors influencing entrepreneurship in the weaving sector.

3.2 Data Collection

A. Profile of the study area

The study area for the purpose of the study will be Ri-Bhoi District. Ri - Bhoi is an administrative district in the state of Meghalaya. The district headquarters is located at Nongpoh. The district occupies an area of 2378 km² and has a population of 258,840.

B. Delimitation of the Study

The present research confined to study only the weaving artisans in the Ri - Bhoi district of Meghalaya. The sample of the study consisted of 400 weaving artisans located in the 4 existing blocks of the Ri - Bhoi district.

C. Universe

Table 1.1: Universe of the study is Ri – Bhoi District of Meghalaya.

Sl. No.	Blocks	Clusters	Govt. Function centres for Handloom & Weaving	Female		Male		Total Population
				Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	
1	Umling	8	3	1657	1301		2	2960
2	Umsning	2	3	135	105			240
3	Jirang	4	1	761	599			1360
4	Bhoirymbong	4		247	193			440
Grand Total		**18**	**7**	**2800**	**2198**		**2**	**5000**

Source: Directorate of Sericulture and Weaving, Govt. of Meghalaya, 2021

The universe of the study comprises of all the four blocks: Umsning, Umling, Jirang and Bhoirymbong coming under the Jurisdiction of Ri – Bhoi District of Meghalaya having 18 weaving clusters (Mawryngkang, Pahamskhen, Plasha, Mawlong, Umdohkha, Umphing, Diwon, Borkhatsari, Sonidan, Korhadem, Balakhawa, Ranibari, Nongladew, Bilpara, Umtngam, Ingsaw, Birsiej and Sohliya) with a working population of 5000. The number of female weavers in each cluster belonging to Umling is 2958, Umsning is 240, Jirang is 1360 and Bhoirymbong is 440.A total number of 4998 female weavers and 2 male weavers are engaged in weaving.

D. Sample of the Study

Table 1.2: Sample of the study

Sl. No	Blocks	Sample Clusters from Each Block	Sample from each block
1	Umling	2	100
2	Umsning	2	100
3	Jirang	2	100
4	Bhoirymbong	2	100
Total		**8**	**400**

The study's sampling process is designed to achieve an unbiased, representative sample of weaving clusters across Umsning Block and three additional blocks, with two clusters selected per block to ensure balanced distribution and equal representation. A random sampling method will be used to select clusters, reducing selection bias and ensuring fair representation of diverse socio-economic contexts. In each of the eight clusters, 100 entrepreneurs will be randomly chosen, resulting in a total sample of 400 participants. This equal representation allows for a thorough analysis of the challenges and experiences faced by weaving entrepreneurs. An interview schedule and scale will be developed to systematically collect both quantitative and qualitative data, providing consistent insights into entrepreneurial motivation, challenges, and available support systems across all clusters.

E. Tools used

The study utilized a five-point Likert scale to assess the entrepreneurial transformation capabilities of weaving artisans. Respondents rated each statement on a scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." To establish validity, item-test correlation showed a strong validity index ($\mathbf{r}_{xy}$ between 0.76 and 0.88). A t-test confirmed the scale's discrimination index, with statements effectively differentiating

between upper and lower respondent groups. Reliability was assessed using the test-retest method, yielding a high reliability coefficient ($\mathbf{r}_{xy} = 0.96$).

F. Statistical techniques

The data collected by the tool was analysed according to the research questions and the hypothesis.

1. The levels of entrepreneurial transformation were assessed using mean (X) and standard deviation (SD) for the total score. Transformation scores were categorized into low (1-3), moderate (3-4), and high (4-5) levels, with SD values indicating variability: low (<0.60), moderate (0.60-0.80), and high (>0.80).

2. t-tests were conducted to determine significant differences in entrepreneurial transformation scores across groups defined by age, education and economic status

4.0 Analysis and Interpretation

Analyses and interpretation of data is based on the study's objective, focusing on the entrepreneurial transformation of weaving artisans. It examines their motivational factors. Statistical techniques were used to test the research question and hypotheses, with data analysed using SPSS and Excel to ensure accurate interpretation. The mean (X) and standard deviation (S.D) were used for testing the research questions and t – test (independent) was used for testing the null hypothesis.

The researcher had planned to present the study in two parts as follow:

1. Levels of entrepreneurial transformational capabilities rated by weaving artisans in total group of samples and classified by levels of motivational factors of weaving artisans.

2. Comparison between mean scores of entrepreneurial transformation rated by weaving handicraft artisans belonging to different groups of age, educational qualification, economic status of weaving artisans.

4.1 Levels that measure the entrepreneurial transformation (total sample group)

To assess entrepreneurial transformation capabilities, the study calculated mean (X) and standard deviation (SD) for responses for motivational factors. Among 400 weaving artisans, scores were categorized as low (1–3), moderate (3–4), or high (4–5) transformation levels. Standard deviation values indicated variability, with SD < 0.60 representing low variability, SD between 0.60 and 0.80 for moderate variability, and SD > 0.80 for high variability.

Table 2.1: Mean Scored and Standard Deviation of Motivational Factors (MF) Rated by Weaving Artisans

Entrepreneurial Transformation		**$\bar{X}$**	**SD**	**Level**
Motivational Factors (MF)		**3.85**	**0.26**	**Moderate**
MF 11	Strive for **achievement** motivates me highly.	4.57	0.53	High
MF 7	**Success** is the only motivation I need.	4.54	0.71	High
MF 12	I experience **personal growth**.	4.43	0.69	High
MF 8	**Self – realization** is what motivated me to become an entrepreneur.	4.40	0.65	High
MF 1	There are grounds for **optimism** when engaged in an entrepreneurial activity.	4.39	0.56	High
MF 16	Entrepreneurship provides me the **flexibility** to do what's important to me.	4.38	0.61	High
MF 6	I took up entrepreneurship to become **independent** and be my own boss.	4.35	0.67	High
MF 13	**Wealth** accumulation does not motivate me.	4.30	0.68	High
MF 2	My **experience** does not motivate me to take up entrepreneurship.	4.05	0.72	High
MF 4	My entrepreneurial activity has **social acceptance**.	3.75	0.63	Moderate
MF 15	My entrepreneurial activity does not provide me with better **financial rewards**.	3.52	0.65	Moderate
MF 10	My enthusiasm to **innovate** did not motivate me to take up an entrepreneurial activity	3.41	1.00	Moderate
MF 3	Opportunities provided by the government motivated me to take up entrepreneurship.	3.38	0.73	Moderate
MF 9	Recognition is not one of the factors for taking up entrepreneurship.	3.17	0.81	Moderate
MF 14	I am able to provide job opportunities to my community.	3.13	0.50	Moderate
MF 5	Availability of **social capital** does not determine my level of motivation towards an entrepreneurial activity.	2.91	0.93	Low
MF 17	**Product demand** is not high enough to sustain my entrepreneurial activity.	2.87	0.70	Low

From the table 2.1, it can be seen that the motivational factors for entrepreneurial transformation among weaving artisans had mean scores ranging from 2.87 to 4.57. The overall mean score was 3.85 (SD = 0.26), indicating a moderate level of motivation.

The highest motivation score (4.57, SD = 0.53) was for "Strive for achievement motivates me highly," reflecting a very high motivation level. The lowest score (2.87, SD = 0.70) was for "Product demand is not high enough to sustain my entrepreneurial activity," indicating a low level of motivation.

Weaving artisans are primarily motivated by personal growth, achievement, and independence in their entrepreneurial work, with less emphasis on financial gain and market demand. High motivation factors include personal fulfilment, flexibility, and wealth accumulation, while social acceptance, financial rewards, and innovation are viewed moderately. Social capital and product demand are rated low as motivators. To boost motivation in these lower-rated areas, the study recommends networking platforms, mentorship, and targeted marketing to increase artisan visibility and demand. Overall, there's a strong consensus on the importance of personal achievement, but mixed views on factors like innovation and social recognition.

4.2 Comparison between mean scores of entrepreneurial transformation (with different groups)

To compare the mean scores of motivational factors, the respondents were classified into different groups of age, educational qualification and economic status.

A. Artisans belonging to different groups of age

The respondents were classified into six age groups for comparing mean scores of motivational factors: Group A (20-25 and 26-30 years), Group B (20-25 and 31-35 years), Group C (20-25 and 36 & above), Group D (26-30 and 31-35 years), Group E (26-30 and 36 & above), and Group F (31-35 and 36 & above).

Table 2.2: Significant Difference between Mean Scores of Motivational Factors Rated by Artisans and Classified by Age

Groups	Variable (Years)	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	SED	p value	t value	Significant / Not Significant
Group A	20 to 25	138	3.80	0.25	0.03	0.07	-1.85	Not Significant
	26 to 30	127	3.86	0.29				
Group B	20 to 25	138	3.80	0.25	0.03	0.00	-4.19	Significant
	31 to 35	121	3.92	0.23				
Group C	20 to 25	138	3.80	0.25	0.07	0.56	0.59	Not Significant
	36 & above	14	3.76	0.25				
Group D	26 to 30	127	3.86	0.29	0.03	0.06	-1.92	Not Significant
	31 to 35	121	3.92	0.23				
Group E	26 to 30	127	3.86	0.29	0.07	0.17	1.43	Not Significant
	36 & above	14	3.76	0.25				
Group F	31 to 35	121	3.92	0.23	0.07	0.03	2.35	Significant
	36 & above	14	3.76	0.25				

From the table 2.2, it can be seen that the difference in mean scores for motivational factors among weaving artisans in Groups A, C, D, and E is not significant, meaning these groups have similar ratings. Thus, the null hypothesis no. a (i) for these groups is accepted. However, in Group B and Group F, the differences are significant, indicating that age affects the mean scores of motivational factors. Therefore, the null hypothesis no. a (i) for these groups is rejected, with Group B and Group F showing higher motivational scores.

B. Artisans belonging to different educational qualification groups

The respondents had been classified into three groups, i.e. Group A (Class 12 or lower and Bachelor's Degree), Group B (Class 12 or lower and Master's Degree) and Group C (Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree).

Table 2.3: Significant difference between Mean Scores of Motivational Factors Rated by Artisans and Classified by Educational Qualification

Groups	Variable (Educational Qualification)	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	SED	p value	t value	Significant / Not Significant
Group A	Class 12 or lower	357	3.85	0.26	0.06	0.08	-1.84	Not Significant
	Bachelor's Degree	20	3.96	0.27				
Group B	Class 12 or lower	357	3.85	0.26	0.05	0.85	0.19	Not Significant
	Master's Degree	23	3.84	0.25				
Group C	Bachelor's Degree	20	3.96	0.27	0.08	0.13	1.57	Not Significant
	Master's Degree	23	3.84	0.25				

From the table 2.3, it can be seen that the differences in mean scores for motivational factors among weaving artisans in Groups A, B, and C are not significant, indicating that the educational qualifications in these groups have similar values. The finding thus accepted the null hypothesis No. a (ii) for these groups.

C. Artisans belonging to different groups of economic status

The respondents were classified into one group, i.e. middle class and lower class.

Table 2.4: Significant difference between Mean scores of Motivational Factors Rated by Artisans and Classified by Economic Status

Groups	Variable (Eco. Stat.)	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	SED	p value	t value	Significant / Not Significant
Group A	Middle Class	43	3.90	0.27	0.04	0.26	1.13	Not Significant
	Lower Class	357	3.85	0.26				

From the table 2.4, it can be seen that the difference in mean scores for motivational factors in Group A is not significant, indicating that the economic status ratings of weaving artisans in this group have equal value. The finding thus accepted the null hypothesis No. a (iii) for this group.

5.0 Main Findings and Discussions

5.1 Main findings

1. Motivational Drivers: Artisans in weaving are primarily motivated by intrinsic factors like personal growth, financial independence, and self-achievement, with personal motivations and market-driven innovation contributing most to entrepreneurial success.

2. Hypothesis Findings: The study revealed that age significantly influences the motivational factors of weaving artisans, with older age groups (Groups B and F) displaying higher motivation. However, educational qualifications and economic status did not significantly affect artisans' motivation, suggesting these factors have a similar impact across different groups.

5.2 Key Insights

1. Intrinsic Motivation as a Key Driver: Artisans in weaving are primarily motivated by intrinsic factors such as personal growth, financial independence, and self-achievement. This indicates that fostering self-driven goals and providing opportunities for skill enhancement and innovation can significantly contribute to their entrepreneurial success.

2. Age as a Significant Influence on Motivation: The study highlights that older artisans exhibit higher motivation compared to younger groups, suggesting that life experience or maturity may enhance their drive. However, educational qualifications and economic status have little variation in their impact, implying that interventions to support artisans should focus more on age-specific strategies rather than socio-economic or educational adjustments.

5.3 Discussions

Objective 1

The researcher's findings closely align with previous studies that have identified key motivational factors for artisans in the handicraft and weaving sectors. These factors largely revolve around intrinsic desires for personal achievement, independence, self-growth, and financial autonomy, all of which have been consistent in earlier research by Gayatri & Udhyakumar (2018) and Mitra & Paul (2017). The need for personal fulfilment and the ability to control one's own destiny emerge as

strong motivators for artisans, with the pursuit of independence in both personal and professional spheres driving them toward entrepreneurship.

Additionally, the desire for flexibility in working hours, freedom from rigid employment structures, and the support of family are significant influences. Many artisans are also motivated by dissatisfaction with their previous jobs, as they seek opportunities to improve their economic conditions and lifestyle, a finding that echoes Herslund & Sorensen's (2001) work on entrepreneurship in the handicraft sector. The role of social acceptance and financial rewards also stands out as crucial motivators, as artisans seek recognition and respect within their communities, as well as economic benefits from their entrepreneurial efforts. These findings are consistent with Upadhyay (2019) and Hengky (2014), who highlight how the promise of financial success and social status can drive artisans to establish their own businesses. While the study acknowledges the importance of social capital and the demand for products, particularly through online marketing and digital tools, these are seen as secondary to the primary intrinsic motivations. Social capital—such as community support and access to networks—along with the ability to sell products through digital platforms, certainly plays a role in expanding market reach, but the core drivers remain rooted in personal aspirations, financial independence, and the capacity for innovation.

Overall, the findings reinforce the idea that for artisans, personal motivations (such as achieving self-sufficiency and pursuing growth) and innovation are the primary catalysts for entrepreneurial success. Social capital and digital tools, while important, serve more as enablers that support these intrinsic motivations, rather than the driving forces behind them. This underscores the importance of fostering personal empowerment and creativity in supporting artisans' entrepreneurial journeys.

Hypothesis

The present study explores several factors influencing the success of weaving artisans, revealing key findings:

1. **Age and Motivation/Success**: Older artisans show higher motivation, likely due to their experience and connection to tradition, while younger artisans report greater entrepreneurial success, possibly due to a willingness to innovate and adapt to new technologies.
2. **Education and Economic Status**: No significant differences were found in motivation based on education or economic status, suggesting that cultural pride and passion for the craft are more influential than formal qualifications or financial background.

Overall, the study highlights that weaving artisans are primarily driven by intrinsic motivations like personal growth, financial independence, and cultural pride. While older artisans show higher motivation due to experience and tradition, younger artisans achieve greater success through innovation and adaptability. Education and economic status have little impact on motivation, emphasizing passion and cultural connection as key factors. Social capital and digital tools support growth but play a secondary role to intrinsic drivers. These findings suggest the need for age-specific strategies and a focus on leveraging artisans' intrinsic motivations for sustainable success.

6.0 Conclusion

This study, aligned with the theme "*Threads of Change: A Lifelong Learning Strategy for Women's Entrepreneurial Empowerment in the Weaving Sector of Ri-Bhoi District, Meghalaya,*" underscores the centrality of intrinsic motivations—such as personal growth, financial independence, and cultural pride—in driving entrepreneurial success among women artisans. The findings reveal that age significantly influences motivation, with older artisans demonstrating higher intrinsic drive due to their experience and connection to tradition, while younger artisans achieve greater success by leveraging innovation and adaptability. Education and economic status were found to have minimal impact on motivation, highlighting the importance of cultural pride and passion over formal qualifications or financial background. Additionally, while social capital and digital tools serve as valuable support mechanisms, the focus must remain on fostering lifelong learning strategies that empower women artisans to enhance their skills, embrace innovation, and sustain their entrepreneurial ventures.

The "*Threads of Change*" approach calls for targeted, age-specific interventions that not only promote personal growth and financial independence but also cultivate a culture of continuous learning and adaptation within the weaving sector. This strategy has the potential to empower women artisans in Ri-Bhoi District to navigate changing market dynamics, preserve cultural heritage, and achieve sustainable success.

6.1 Suggestions

1. **Leverage Intrinsic Motivations through Tailored Training Programs**: Develop training initiatives focusing on personal growth, self-achievement, and financial independence. Programs should encourage artisans to set and achieve personal goals while fostering a sense of pride in their craft.

2. **Foster Age-Specific Strategies for Motivation and Success**: For older artisans, introduce programs that build on their experience and traditional knowledge, such as heritage skill preservation and mentorship opportunities. For younger artisans, focus on fostering innovation, adaptability, and the use of modern tools and technologies to enhance entrepreneurial success.

3. **Promote Digital Literacy and Market Innovation**: Provide digital literacy workshops and access to e-commerce platforms, enabling artisans to adapt to market driven innovations. Highlight the role of online marketing and networking to boost product visibility and increase financial returns.

4. **Strengthen Social Capital and Community Support**: Establish artisan networks or cooperatives to enhance collaboration, shared learning, and mutual support. Such networks can also facilitate the sharing of resources, access to markets, and collective problem-solving.

5. **Encourage Lifelong Learning for Sustained Empowerment**: Aligning with the "*Threads of Change*" strategy, implement continuous learning programs that empower artisans to adapt to evolving market demands while preserving cultural heritage. These programs should be designed to build confidence, technical skills, and entrepreneurial capabilities at all stages of life.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 66-79
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00005.1
ISSN 0019-5006

A Policy Perspective on Media Literacy in Adult Education: Insights from NEP 2020

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Abstract

Media literacy has become an essential skill in today's digital age, particularly for adult learners in rural areas and marginalized communities. Critically analyzing and evaluating media content is crucial for fostering informed, responsible citizenship and ensuring social and economic empowerment. While the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 envisions a transformative approach to adult education and lifelong learning, it lacks a clear focus on media literacy, which is vital in the digital era. Earlier policies, such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968, NPE 1986, and the Programme of Action (PoE) 1992, laid the foundation for adult education but did not specifically address media literacy. This paper critically examines policy provisions for adult education and media literacy, identifying key gaps in their integration within lifelong learning frameworks. It also explores the challenges of implementing media literacy programmes, including digital disparities between urban and rural areas, the absence of a structured media literacy curriculum for adult learners, and the lack of gender-sensitive approaches. Furthermore, the study highlights the role of international organizations like UNESCO and the United Nations, whose frameworks have influenced global practices in media literacy and lifelong learning. The findings underscore the urgent need for a national media literacy framework tailored to adult education, incorporating localized content in regional languages and ensuring gender inclusivity. The paper recommends embedding media literacy into existing adult education programmes and leveraging grassroots innovations, such as NGO-led initiatives like Nirantar's community media projects and the Digital India Foundation's digital literacy programmes. By addressing these gaps, India can

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empower adult learners, especially women and marginalized groups to engage with media critically, participate actively in democratic processes, and navigate the complexities of the digital world.

Keywords: *UNESCO, media literacy, lifelong learning, adult education, digital skill, NEP 2020.*

1. Introduction

With the advent of new media technologies, the role of media in shaping society has undergone a transformative shift. This shift has led scholars to re-conceptualize literacy from a traditional notion of reading and writing to new media literacy, encompassing the competencies to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media content (Potter, 2016; Hobbs, 2010). In today's digital age, media literacy is an essential skill for individuals to navigate the complex and evolving information landscape (Livingstone, 2004). For adults, critically assessing media content, detecting misinformation, and engaging with digital platforms meaningfully is crucial for personal, social, and economic development, especially for people from rural and marginalized backgrounds (UNESCO, 2017).

Recognizing the significance of lifelong learning and adult education, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 claims to envisions a holistic and inclusive education approach incorporating digital and media literacy (Government of India, 2020). However, integrating media literacy within adult education programmes remains an underexplored area in India. India's policies on adult education have evolved significantly, shaped by international frameworks such as UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), which emphasize the role of education in fostering active citizenship and critical thinking (UNESCO, 2015; UIL, 2022).

Historically, India's approach to adult education has progressed through various policy stages. The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1968 was the first significant document to acknowledge the importance of universal literacy. Later, NPE 1986 emphasized bridging disparities between social groups through inclusive education, focusing on women's empowerment and functional literacy (Government of India, 1986). The Programme of Action (PoA) 1992 further reinforced these goals by advocating for community-driven literacy programmes. These earlier policies provided the foundation for NEP 2020, which seeks to modernize adult education by incorporating digital and media literacy into lifelong learning frameworks.

This paper critically examines the policy provisions on media literacy in NEP 2020, particularly concerning adult education, and evaluates their effectiveness in addressing media literacy as a component of lifelong learning. Additionally, it identifies key challenges in implementing media literacy programmes for adult learners, particularly in rural and urban communities, and proposes policy recommendations to bridge these gaps. The research uses secondary sources, including government reports, policy documents, and scholarly literature, to analyze policy gaps and opportunities.

This study is based on the following objectives:

- To critically analyze the provisions of NEP 2020 related to adult education and assess how effectively they address the media literacy framework as a component of lifelong learning;
- To identify gaps and challenges in implementing media literacy programmes for adult learners, particularly in rural and urban communities in India;
- To propose policy recommendations to address the identified gaps and enhance media literacy integration within adult education programmes.

2. Conceptual Framework of Media Literacy

Media Literacy: Definition and Framework

Scholars and international organizations have widely discussed media literacy as an essential skill for engaging with contemporary information environments. It is broadly defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms (UNESCO, 2010: 73). This extends beyond digital literacy, including critical thinking, ethical media engagement, and active participation in democratic processes (Hobbs, 2010: 42). Scholars such as Renee Hobbs emphasize media literacy's role in fostering critical engagement and civic participation, which are crucial in democratic societies, including India (Hobbs, 2010:17; Kellner & Share, 2019: 12).

Despite its growing importance, India lacks a unified national framework for media literacy, unlike countries such as Finland and Canada, where it is systematically incorporated into educational curricula (Kellner & Share, 2019). Instead, India's approach prioritizes digital access over critical media engagement skills, potentially making its population more susceptible to misinformation and digital manipulation (Das & Schroeder, 2020: 1774).

Media literacy in the context of adult education extends beyond basic literacy, e.g., 3Rs, i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic. On the other hand, digital literacy includes competencies such as recognizing bias, identifying misinformation, thinking critically about media messages, and utilizing information ethically. These skills empower individuals to engage in public discourse, participate in democratic processes, and assert their rights as informed citizens (Stratu-Strelet, 2020).

Adult Education and Lifelong Learning: A Conceptual Shift

The discourse on adult education and lifelong learning has evolved significantly under the influence of UNESCO and its affiliated organizations. Traditionally, literacy was viewed as basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills (e.g. 3Rs). However, UNESCO's perspective has expanded this definition to include functional, critical, and multiple literacies, recognizing that literacy is not a fixed skill but a dynamic set of competencies essential for personal needs and societal development (UNESCO, 2015: 26; UIL, 2022).

As defined by UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL), adult education enables individuals to develop knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout life to participate in economic, social, and political spheres (UIL, 2015: 7). This shift towards lifelong learning aligns with India's NEP 2020, which seeks to integrate adult education with digital literacy and critical media engagement (GOI, 2020).

Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy and Media Literacy

The global adult education movement has been profoundly shaped by Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, which argues that education should be an instrument for liberation and empowerment rather than passive knowledge transfer (Freire, 1970: 74). According to Freire, education should enable learners to examine social realities critically, challenge dominant narratives, and engage in transformative action - principles directly applicable to media literacy (Freire, 1970: 76; Giroux, 2011).

Freire's concept of "critical consciousness" (conscientization) is particularly relevant to media literacy, as it emphasizes questioning power structures, deconstructing media messages, and resisting propaganda. This framework positions media literacy as a vital tool for democratic participation and social change, particularly in societies where media influence is pervasive (Freire, 1973; Kellner, 2020).

Media Literacy as Part of the Broader Conceptual Framework

Incorporating media literacy into adult education aligns with this broader conceptual shift from basic to critical and digital literacies. As a multidimensional skill, media literacy is essential for lifelong learning, as it empowers individuals to engage in informed decision-making and participate actively in democratic processes; recognize and resist disinformation, fake news, and biased narratives; utilize digital and media tools for self-expression and community engagement; and improve socio-economic opportunities through access to credible information and skill development (Stratu-Strelet, 2023; UIL, 2022). Thus, media literacy should not be seen in isolation but as an integral part of lifelong learning and adult education policies, particularly in the context of India's evolving educational landscape under NEP 2020.

3. Media Literacy and Adult Education in NEP 2020: Policy Provisions

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes adult education as a crucial component of lifelong learning, categorizing it into five key areas: foundational literacy and numeracy, critical life skills, vocational skills development, basic literacy, and continuing education (GOI, 2020). While media literacy is not explicitly mentioned, its core elements, such as critical thinking, digital literacy, and information verification, are embedded within these broader objectives. Given the increasing challenges of misinformation and digital manipulation, integrating media literacy within adult education is essential to developing individuals' ability to analyze media content, identify biases, and distinguish between reliable and misleading information. (Mihailidis, 2019). Although NEP 2020 does not directly outline media literacy initiatives, its emphasis on critical thinking and problem-solving aligns with the principles of media literacy, highlighting the policy's potential to promote informed digital engagement.

A significant provision of the NEP 2020 emphasizes technology-driven learning to enhance adult education in India. By integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into educational frameworks, the policy aims to improve digital literacy, critical thinking, and media literacy among adult learners.

A pivotal initiative in this regard is the establishment of the National Educational Technology Forum (NETF), an autonomous body designed to facilitate the free exchange of ideas on the use of technology to enrich learning, assessment, planning, and administration across educational sectors (GOI, 2020: 56).

To ensure accessible and equitable adult education programmes, NEP 2020 advocates leveraging existing digital platforms such as SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) and DIKSHA (Digital Infrastructure for Knowledge Sharing). These platforms offer a wide array of e-learning materials, enabling learners to access high-quality educational resources irrespective of their geographical location.

The policy emphasizes that technology integration should be meticulously planned to ensure that digital learning platforms are utilized effectively for enhancing the learning experience (GOI, 2020: 56).

Furthermore, NEP 2020 underscores the importance of integrating media literacy modules within these digital platforms to enhance adult learners' ability to critically engage with online information, assess sources, and develop digital resilience. Research highlights that digital literacy is a foundation for media literacy, aiding individuals in effectively accessing, evaluating, and navigating media content.

NEP 2020 aims to bridge critical gaps in adult learners' capabilities to navigate misinformation, digital fraud, and biased media narratives by embedding media literacy training into existing digital learning infrastructures. This initiative aligns with the policy's broader goal of fostering an informed and media-savvy adult population, contributing to lifelong learning in the digital age.

In addition to digital initiatives, The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recognizes the crucial role of community participation and local institutions in strengthening adult education. The policy emphasizes the importance of leveraging public and community spaces such as libraries, schools, and other local centers to provide accessible lifelong learning opportunities. These community-driven initiatives are particularly designed to improve accessibility for rural and marginalized populations by providing literacy and skill development programmes that are specific to the needs of the local community.

NEP 2020 recommends fostering community participation in adult education through robust and innovative government initiatives, aiming to achieve 100% literacy at an accelerated pace (GOI, 2020: 52).

Public and community libraries, along with other local learning hubs, provide an opportunity to promote media literacy through community-driven initiatives, enabling learners to engage in discussions, workshops, and practical exercises that develop

their critical media analysis skills. Research indicates that community-based interventions are particularly effective in fostering media literacy, especially among individuals with limited access to formal digital education. These local learning spaces can empower adult learners to analyze media narratives, verify information, and critically understand media influence in public discourse by utilizing interactive and participatory learning models. This approach aligns with NEP 2020's vision of integrating lifelong learning with digital and media literacy, ensuring that even the most underserved populations develop the necessary skills to navigate today's complex media landscape.

However, Indian education policies have evolved to address gender disparities in adult education, but significant gaps remain. NEP 1968 had a limited focus on women's specific learning needs, treating literacy as a general goal without addressing socio-cultural barriers. NEP 1986 marked a shift by linking women's education to empowerment, leading to the Mahila Samakhya programme (1988), which emphasized collective learning, participatory curricula, and social transformation. This model proved that women's literacy is most effective when tied to empowerment and community action.

NEP 2020 recognizes gender disparities in education and promotes flexible learning, digital inclusion, and vocational training ((GOI, 2020: 26). However, it lacks a structured framework for collective empowerment akin to Mahila Samakhya. While policy reforms acknowledge the need for inclusive education, they often overlook the fact that women's learning is deeply rooted in social interactions and shared experiences rather than isolated literacy initiatives.

Research in adult education indicates that interactive and participatory learning environments encourage women's engagement more effectively than traditional literacy programmes. Drawing from global best practices, Indian policy must prioritize gender-responsive adult education by integrating participatory models and grassroots collaborations, ensuring education is a literacy and social change tool.

Although NEP 2020 lays the groundwork for integrating media literacy in adult education, further policy refinements are needed for its explicit inclusion in lifelong learning. Leveraging digital platforms, strengthening community-based initiatives and gender issues, and embedding critical thinking in adult education can enhance media literacy for informed citizenship and digital participation.

A structured policy implementation and curriculum development approach will equip adult learners with essential skills to navigate today's complex media landscape.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Gaps and Challenges in Integrating Media Literacy into Adult Education under NEP 2020

The evaluation of policy documents reveals gaps at both the rulebook and implementation levels. While NEP 2020 provides a broad framework for adult education, recommending strong government initiatives for 100% literacy by 2047, its approach to media literacy remains vague and insufficient. This section highlights the need for a more structured and inclusive framework for media literacy in adult education by examining key policy gaps and ambiguities.

One of the most critical challenges is the digital divide, which significantly impacts media literacy and adult education, particularly in underprivileged and rural areas. Only 38% of Indian households are digitally literate, with substantially lower percentages in rural regions, and only 31% of the population in rural areas has an internet connection, compared to 67% in urban areas (Oxfam India, 2022, p. 21). On a global scale, UESCO (2020) reports that 773 million adults lack basic literacy skills, with two-thirds being women. Furthermore, the Education for All GMR (2014) indicates that 37% of the world's illiterate population resides in India. These issues were made worse by the COVID-19 epidemic, which interrupted adult education and increased digital exclusion, especially for women. This highlighted the urgent need to bridge the digital divide and assist underserved communities.

A significant policy gap is the lack of a structured media literacy curriculum in adult education. While NEP 2020 acknowledges digital literacy, it does not explicitly define media literacy as a core component of lifelong learning. Despite years of media education in India, it remains an evolving discipline. The absence of a well-defined curriculum leaves adult learners without essential skills to critically analyze media, engage with digital content responsibly, and identify misinformation. Without a structured approach, media literacy remains a theoretical concept rather than a practical skill in adult education frameworks.

A significant gap in NEP 2020's provisions is the lack of an explicit focus on gender disparities in adult education. Historically, women's learning styles and engagement differ from men's. Research and practice in adult education shows that

literacy programmes alone do not always attract women; collective interactions, shared experiences, and community-driven learning foster participation. NPE 1986's Mahila Samakhya programme proved that women's adult education must emphasize empowerment at both personal and collective levels. Theoretical and practical insights into adult education suggest that women are more likely to engage in learning through peer discussions, storytelling, and shared experiences rather than rigid literacy-based curricula. This participatory model, where women help shape the curriculum, sustains learning and drives social change. NEP 2020 lacks this approach, raising concerns about its gender-inclusivity. Effective adult education must foster interactive, experience-driven learning rather than solely focusing on literacy.

Furthermore, the UNESCO's UIL highlights individual and collective empowerment in women's adult education. Globally, 122 million girls and 128 million boys are out of school, and women still account for almost two-thirds of all adults who are unable to read.[2] Nirantar and Digital India Foundation work to bridge the gender gap in digital literacy. However, NEP 2020 lacks participatory models, overlooking women's unique challenges in digital engagement. The policy must integrate empowerment driven and collective learning approaches for inclusive media literacy.

Additionally, the lack of media literacy training for educators is a critical shortcoming. The policy doesn't include any particular recommendations or training programmes for teachers in adult education. Effective media literacy education requires trained educators who can guide learners in digital engagement, critical thinking, and responsible media consumption. Integrating media literacy into adult education will remain challenging without adequate teacher training, limiting its real-world impact.

The policy also fails to address media bias and misinformation, two significant issues in today's digital environment. Adult learners are susceptible to manipulation since NEP 2020 does not include specific strategies to help adult learners critically assess media content or combat digital misinformation. This omission is a critical policy gap, given the increasing influence of disinformation on public discourse. Although studies show that media literacy can help combat false information (Livingstone, 2018; Hobbs, 2021), the policy ignores this growing concern.

[2]UNESCO https://www.unesco.org › gender-equality › education Retrieved from Google on 19 Feb. 2025.

In addition to these structural and content gaps, several other implementation challenges hinder the integration of media literacy into adult education under NEP 2020. Language difficulties restrict non-native English speakers from accessing media literacy content, while lack of infrastructure in rural places limits digital access. Socio-cultural resistance further complicates adoption, as some groups believe media literacy is unnecessary. Additionally, a lack of awareness among educators and learners' limits programme adoption.

5. Recommendations

A significant government priority should be to develop a National Media Literacy Framework through adult education programmes. This framework must offer clear objectives, benchmarks, and guidelines for fostering media literacy across diverse demographic groups. It should align with broader national education plans, such as NEP 2020, ensuring individuals have essential skills to navigate the evolving media landscape. In addition to defining clear guidelines, the framework should cover various aspects of media literacy, including understanding media content, assessing sources, sharing information responsibly, and consuming media ethically. Collaboration between civil society organizations, media outlets, and academic institutions is crucial for ensuring inclusivity.

Media literacy should be integrated into existing adult learning programmes to maximize outreach. Foundational literacy initiatives, continuing education programmes, and community learning centers provide ideal platforms for embedding media literacy content. Adult learners engaged in skill development and digital literacy programmes can simultaneously be trained to spot misinformation, evaluate media credibility, and make informed decisions. In addition to enhancing critical thinking, embedding media literacy will empower learners to participate actively in civic and political processes.

Case Studies of NGO driven literacy programmes demonstrate the impact of grassroots initiatives. Nirantar's - Pitara[3], a local newspaper initiative led by village women, enhances literacy while fostering critical engagement with news. Similarly, the Digital India Foundation focuses on digital literacy, misinformation awareness, and online safety, particularly in rural areas. In addition to strengthening community driven models, integrating such grassroots-driven media literacy initiatives into NEP 2020 can bridge urban-rural disparities and make media education more accessible.

[3]https://give.do/discover/19UP/nirantar/

Access to the internet remains a significant barrier to media literacy, particularly in rural and marginalized communities. The government must expand digital infrastructure by ensuring reliable internet connectivity, affordable digital devices, and electricity in underserved areas.

In addition to strengthening the Digital India programme, initiatives such as community internet hubs, device subsidies, and partnerships with private tech companies can help narrow the digital divide. Expanding digital access will enable citizens to engage effectively with media literacy programmes.

Teachers and community facilitators play a critical role in promoting media literacy. A structured teacher training programme should be developed to equip educators with media literacy concepts, digital tools, and effective teaching strategies. In addition to training educators in rural and disadvantaged areas, key elements of this initiative should include workshops, continuous professional development, mentorship programmes, and educator networks to exchange best practices and resources.

For media literacy programmes to be effective, they must be contextualized to regional languages, cultures, and media practices. Developing localized educational materials will make programmes more relatable, ensuring diverse communities engage meaningfully. In addition to creating language-sensitive curricula, collaborations with local cultural, political, and social organizations will help tailor media literacy initiatives to community needs. A powerful example is Khabar Lahariya, a community newspaper launched in 2002 by the NGO Nirantar that empowers marginalized voices by publishing in local dialects. Its success is recognized through awards like the Laadli Media Award and the Chameli Devi Women in Journalism Award, highlighting the importance of localized, community-driven media initiatives in strengthening media literacy and public engagement.

NEP 2020 must adopt a gender-responsive approach to make adult education truly inclusive. Women's learning needs differ from men's, and basic literacy alone does not always attract them. Interactive, experience-sharing, and community-driven learning approaches are crucial.

The Mahila Samkhya programme exemplified the effectiveness of participatory education models prioritizing empowerment at both personal and collective levels. In addition to prioritizing participatory education models, structured frameworks for women's adult education should include grassroots collaborations, peer-learning networks, and flexible learning mechanisms to address socio-cultural barriers. Digital

literacy programmes tailored to women's needs must also be prioritized to bridge the gendered digital divide.

Media literacy programmes must empower individuals to recognize misinformation, media bias, and unethical journalism. Training should focus on factchecking, propaganda detection, understanding algorithms, and evaluating sources. In addition to fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and ethical media consumption, partnerships with fact-checking organizations and media professionals should be encouraged.

These collaborations will help individuals navigate the information landscape responsibly and foster an engaged, informed citizenry. These recommendations provide essential pillars for a strong media literacy ecosystem in India. By integrating grassroots models, expanding digital access, and embedding critical thinking skills into adult education, India can create a resilient and informed society equipped to tackle the challenges of the digital age.

6. Conclusion

Media literacy is a crucial component of lifelong learning in today's information-rich and digitally complex environment. While NEP 2020 lays out a roadmap for adult education, it lacks a dedicated focus on media literacy, particularly in the context of the digital age. An independent media literacy framework is essential to equip adults with the critical skills for navigating the evolving and often distorted media landscape.

The contributions of various NGOs, such as *Nirantar* and the *Digital India Foundation*, highlight innovative approaches that bridge conventional literacy with digital and media literacy. *Nirantar's* work integrating digital literacy into adult learning programmes, particularly for women, and its initiative of training women to produce the local newspaper *Pitara* demonstrates how grassroots efforts can create sustainable literate environments. Similarly, the *Digital India Foundation's* initiatives in digital literacy reflect an effort to enhance digital access and cyber awareness. Incorporating such models into national policies could provide valuable insights for integrating media literacy into adult education and lifelong learning programmes under NEP 2020.

Furthermore, India's policy trajectory in media and digital literacy has been shaped not only by domestic initiatives but also by international frameworks. Organizations like UNESCO and the UIL have played a significant role in defining

global best practices, many of which have influenced India's education policies. Earlier policies, such as the National Policy on Education (NPE) of 1968 and 1986, laid the groundwork for lifelong learning strategies, but they must now be expanded to include media literacy as a core component. Additionally, it is crucial to integrate gender-sensitive approaches in policy recommendations to ensure equitable access and meaningful participation, particularly for women and marginalized communities.

As India moves toward a more digitally connected future, embedding media literacy within adult education policies will not only empower individuals to engage critically with media but also strengthen democratic participation and social inclusion. A comprehensive and inclusive media literacy framework, informed by global perspectives and grassroots innovations, is necessary to create a resilient and informed citizenry.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 80-93
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00006.3
ISSN 0019-5006

Digital Literacy in India: Challenges, Successes and Pathways for Inclusive Growth

• **Kezhalhousa**[1]

Abstract

Digital literacy programmes in India have emerged as crucial initiatives focused on closing the digital gap and empowering individuals, especially in rural and marginalised communities. This study investigates the effects of these programme on job prospects, service availability, and knowledge-based empowerment enhancement. This underscores effective programmes like the Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan Yojana and the National Digital Literacy Mission, stressing the significance of governmental backing and community involvement. Nevertheless, the paper highlights significant shortcomings in current studies and initiatives, such as a narrow emphasis on at-risk groups, a lack of extensive longitudinal research, and the necessity for improved alignment with vocational training. Proposed future directions include targeted programmes for marginalised groups, the integration of digital skills with vocational training, longitudinal impact assessments, and enhanced collaboration among stakeholders. By focussing on these areas, India can improve its digital literacy initiatives to foster inclusive socio-economic growth.

Keywords: *Digital literacy, employment opportunities, marginalized populations, vocational training.*

1. Introduction

Digital literacy is a crucial competency in contemporary society, facilitating individuals' ability to traverse complex digital environments. The government's *Digital India* initiative aims to empower citizens by improving digital skills and technology access. Despite the ambitious goals of this initiative, various challenges hinder the effective implementation of digital literacy programmes, especially for marginalised populations. Accessibility issues, such as the digital divide exacerbated by socio-economic factors, insufficient infrastructure, and cultural barriers, significantly impede

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the reach and efficacy of these programmes. The implementation of digital literacy programmes in India presents challenges that disproportionately impact marginalised populations. Accessibility issues are significant barriers, primarily influenced by socio-economic factors such as poverty, low literacy rates, and insufficient infrastructure.

The digital divide continues to be a significant issue, especially in rural regions where access to reliable internet and information and communication technology (ICT) resources is limited. Research conducted by Pick, J. B., & Sarkar, A. (2015) and Nedungadi et al. (2018) highlights that these barriers present significant challenges to the objectives of the *Digital India initiative*. A comprehensive framework addressing the unique challenges of vulnerable populations is urgently required. Alongside infrastructural challenges, socio-economic factors contribute substantially to the digital divide between urban and rural populations. Numerous individuals in underserved communities lack essential resources for digital engagement, such as access to electricity and digital devices. Cultural barriers, especially those related to gender disparities, have a substantial impact on digital literacy outcomes. Studies demonstrate that conventional gender roles restrict women's access to technology and education, leading to diminished digital literacy levels in comparison to men. Research by Choudhary and Bansal (2022) identifies distinct barriers encountered by marginalised populations, such as cultural attitudes towards technology and gender biases.

Despite these challenges, India has recognized numerous digital literacy programmes as successful initiatives. Programmes such as the *Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan Yojana* and the *National Digital Literacy Mission* (NDLM) have significantly advanced the development of digital skills among the populace. The programmes illustrate the significance of governmental support and resources in promoting extensive training initiatives. Effective initiatives frequently employ flexible training models that incorporate digital literacy into educational programmes, alongside community-oriented strategies that utilise local expertise and resources. The impact of digital literacy programmes extends beyond individual skills; they significantly enhance employment opportunities, improve access to services, and empower individuals through knowledge. Programmes designed to impart digital skills can improve employability, enhance access to government services, and positively impact health outcomes, especially for marginalised groups. The interrelation of these outcomes underscores the need for continuous investment in digital literacy programmes tailored to the unique contexts of diverse communities.

Thus, despite the considerable challenges faced by digital literacy programmes in India, there is potential for success through innovative strategies and robust

governmental support. Addressing accessibility issues and cultural barriers, along with promoting inclusive frameworks, enables India to foster a digitally literate society that supports inclusive growth and empowerment for all citizens. This research paper scrutinizes the diverse obstacles faced by digital literacy initiatives in India, along with the successful programmes recognized as best practices. This study investigates the influence of digital literacy on employment opportunities, service access, and community empowerment, with the objective of identifying strategies to promote inclusive growth. It further addresses obstacles to digital engagement and analyses the challenges and successes in fostering digital literacy, thereby bridging the digital divide.

2. Review of Major Digital Literacy Programmes in India: Government Initiatives

2.1. The National Digital Literacy Mission, Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan

Government initiatives, particularly the *NDLM* and the *Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan* (PMGDISHA), have significantly shaped India's digital literacy landscape. These programmes constitute a component of a comprehensive strategy within the *Digital India* initiative, aimed at transforming India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy. The *NDLM* was initiated to guarantee digital literacy for every household, enabling efficient use of digital devices and online government services. Recent reports indicate that the initiative has effectively trained millions of individuals in fundamental digital skills, including computer operation and internet usage for tasks such as communication and information retrieval (Joseph et al., 2017; Hassan & Mirza, 2021). The programme emphasizes digital literacy as a fundamental skill required for engagement in the contemporary economy, which is increasingly reliant on technology (Khokhar, 2016; Jena, 2023).

The *PMGDISHA* seeks to enhance digital literacy for 60 million individuals in rural regions, thereby addressing the existing digital divide between urban and rural populations (Gautam et al., 2022; Kollinal et al., 2019). This initiative focusses on imparting basic digital skills while empowering rural citizens to access government services, educational resources, and economic opportunities through digital means (Nedungadi et al., 2018; Choudhuri et al., 2022). The focus on rural digital literacy is essential, as it addresses disparities in access to information and services that can improve livelihoods and enhance quality of life in these communities (Naganjani, 2023; Spires et al., 2018). Both initiatives acknowledge the complex dimensions of digital literacy, which include not only technical skills but also the capacity to critically

assess and produce digital content (Khokhar, 2016; Reedy & Goodfellow, 2014). The *NDLM* includes training designed to promote active engagement with digital content, thereby enhancing digital fluency instead of solely focussing on deficiencies (Julien et al., 2022; Maiti et al., 2019). This approach is consistent with international trends in digital literacy education, emphasising a more sophisticated comprehension of digital literacy in the 21st century (Reedy & Goodfellow, 2014; Radovanoviæ et al., 2020).

Despite these advancements, challenges persist in the implementation of digital literacy programmes in India. Infrastructural deficits, differing levels of pre-existing literacy, and socio-economic barriers persistently obstruct the effectiveness of these initiatives (Khokhar, 2016; Tomar, 2023). Moreover, continuous evaluation and adaptation of training programmes to address the evolving digital landscape is essential for maintaining the momentum of digital literacy initiatives (Patnaik, 2023). In summary, the *NDLM* and *PMGDISHA* are essential elements of India's approach to improving digital literacy, especially in rural regions. These initiatives aim to equip individuals with essential digital skills and foster an inclusive digital economy that empower all segments of society. Ongoing investment in these programmes, coupled with resolution of underlying challenges, is critical for maximizing the potential of digital literacy in India.

3. Challenges in Implementing Digital Literacy Programmes

3.1. Accessibility Issues

The implementation of digital literacy programmes in India encounters significant challenges, especially regarding accessibility issues impacting marginalised populations. The digital divide is a significant barrier, exacerbated by socio-economic factors such as poverty, low literacy rates, and insufficient infrastructure. Pick and Sarkar identify these challenges as substantial obstacles to realising the ambitious objectives of the *Digital India* initiative, which seeks to empower citizens through digital means (Pick & Sarkar, 2015). The absence of reliable internet and ICT facilities, particularly in rural regions, exacerbates the situation, as noted by Nedungadi et al., who underscore the necessity for a framework that tackles the distinct challenges encountered by vulnerable populations (Nedungadi et al., 2018). In low-resource settings, the issue of multiple literacy, including health and financial literacy, is critical. Rasekaba et al. highlight that insufficient digital and health literacy may lead to under-utilization of initiatives dependent on digital solutions, especially among older populations in rural India (Rasekaba et al., 2022).

This implies that a comprehensive understanding and interaction with digital platforms necessitates the combination of digital literacy with other forms of literacy. Intermittent electricity and low bandwidth exacerbate infrastructure challenges, hindering the effective implementation of digital literacy programmes. Khokhar examines the impact of infrastructural deficits on inclusive growth and productivity, highlighting the necessity for digital literacy initiatives to account for these contextual factors (Khokhar, 2016). Massis emphasises the importance of information literacy instruction, which is crucial for lifelong learning and success in educational and professional settings (Massis, 2011). This highlights the necessity of not only granting access to technology but also ensuring individuals have the skills to utilise it effectively. The absence of localised content and language options in digital literacy programmes presents considerable obstacles to accessibility.

Radovanoviæ et al. highlight that the lack of digital interfaces in local languages and pertinent content marginalises a significant segment of the population, especially individuals who are illiterate or semi-literate (Radovanoviæ et al., 2020). This is essential in a diverse nation such as India, where linguistic and cultural variations can greatly influence the efficacy of digital literacy programmes. To address these challenges, it is crucial to develop community-focused strategies that involve the creation of digital hubs, enabling individuals to access technology and receive training. Adeleye emphasizes the importance of integrating digital literacy education into the curriculum across all educational levels to cultivate a digitally competent society (Adeleye, 2024). This method improves accessibility and enables individuals to navigate digital platforms with confidence. The implementation of digital literacy programmes in India faces various challenges, including socio-economic barriers, infrastructural limitations, and the necessity for inclusive educational frameworks. Addressing these issues necessitates a collaborative approach among policymakers, educators and community leaders to foster an environment conducive to the advancement of digital literacy, thereby enhancing the empowerment of marginalised populations.

3.2. Socio-economic Factors & Cultural and Gender Barriers

Implementing a digital literacy programme in India presents significant challenges, particularly in terms of socio-economic factors as well as cultural and gender barriers. The challenges are complex and necessitate a thorough understanding of the fundamental issues that impede effective digital literacy initiatives. Socio-economic factors significantly influence the accessibility and efficacy of digital literacy programmes. Individuals in rural and marginalised communities often lack essential resources, including reliable internet access, electricity, and digital devices, which

are critical for engaging in digital literacy training (Nedungadi et al., 2018; Khokhar, 2016). Nedungadi et al. (2018) emphasise that low internet bandwidth and insufficient ICT facilities significantly restrict low-literate learners' engagement with digital technologies.

Despite the increase in internet and mobile subscriptions, enduring obstacles such as poverty and inadequate infrastructure persistently hinder the advancement of digital literacy in India (Khokhar, 2016). The socio-economic divide results in a notable digital gap, especially between urban and rural populations, thereby intensifying existing inequalities. Cultural barriers significantly hinder the implementation of digital literacy programmes. Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often restrict women's access to technology and education, consequently impacting their levels of digital literacy (Jadallah, Y., et al., 2023; Choudhary & Bansal, 2022). Choudhary and Bansal's research highlights that marginalised populations encounter distinct barriers that impact the efficacy of digital literacy training programmes, such as cultural attitudes towards technology and gender biases (Choudhary & Bansal, 2022).

The absence of culturally relevant content and local language interfaces contributes to the alienation of specific groups, notably women and older adults, from participation in digital platforms (Radovanoviæ et al., 2020). The perception among certain individuals (especially older adults in rural areas) that digital literacy programmes are irrelevant to their daily lives reduces their motivation to engage in such initiatives. In India, gender disparities in digital literacy are notably significant, influenced by societal norms that assign distinct roles and responsibilities to men and women. Research indicates that women typically exhibit lower digital literacy levels than men, a disparity linked to cultural and educational obstacles (Jadallah, Y., et al., 2023; Choudhary & Bansal, 2022).

Findings from a systematic review demonstrate that gender differences significantly influence digital literacy outcomes, with women frequently encountering additional challenges in accessing training and resources (Choudhary & Bansal, 2022). The gender gap restricts women's involvement in the digital economy and reinforces wider societal inequalities. Addressing these challenges requires the development of inclusive digital literacy frameworks that take into account the diverse needs of different populations. These can be customized initiatives to the unique contexts of rural and marginalised communities, integrating components such as health literacy, financial literacy, and eSafety (Nedungadi et al., 2018; Khokhar, 2016). Programmes must engage with local communities to ensure content relevance and cultural appropriateness, thereby enhancing participation and engagement (Radovanoviæ et al., 2020). Addressing socio-economic and cultural barriers enhances

the effectiveness and equity of digital literacy programmes, thereby fostering a more digitally inclusive society in India.

4. Impact of Digital Literacy Programmes

Digital literacy programmes in India are essential initiatives designed to enhance employment opportunities, improve access to services, and empower individuals through knowledge acquisition. These programmes have a multifaceted impact, addressing diverse socio-economic challenges encountered by the population, especially in rural and underserved regions

The enhancement of employment opportunities via digital literacy is substantial: The Indian government has initiated programmes like the *Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan Yojana*, targeting digital literacy for 60 million rural citizens (Gautam et al., 2022). These programmes provide individuals with critical skills for operating digital devices, thus enhancing their employability in an increasingly digitised job market (Joseph et al., 2017). Studies indicate a strong correlation between digital literacy and enhanced financial literacy, which is essential for securing improved job opportunities and effectively managing personal finances (Prasad et al., 2018). This correlation highlights the necessity of combining digital literacy with vocational training to enhance employment outcomes. Digital literacy programmes enhance engagement with government services and healthcare systems, thereby improving access to these services.

Access to services: The *Digital India* initiative seeks to provide government services electronically, thereby minimising bureaucratic obstacles and improving transparency (Choudhuri et al., 2022). Digital literacy allows individuals to utilise these services more efficiently, enhancing their overall quality of life. Research indicates that digital literacy improves the use of reproductive health services among women, leading to enhanced health outcomes and lower maternal and infant mortality rates (Meherali et al., 2021). Digital methods can enhance access to health services in low and middle income countries.

Knowledge is a means towards empowerment: The significance of empowerment through knowledge in digital literacy is substantial. Digital literacy enhances individual agency, facilitating greater societal participation. Inclusive digital literacy frameworks empower marginalised populations, facilitating their engagement in economic activities and community development (Nedungadi et al., 2018). This empowerment extends beyond economic participation to include social inclusion, as individuals acquire the confidence to access information and services that were

previously inaccessible (Sharma et al., 2019). Digital literacy plays a crucial role in fostering social innovation and transformation, acting as a catalyst for wider socio-economic development (Sharma, 2023). In summary, digital literacy programmes in India significantly enhance employment opportunities, improve access to essential services, and empower individuals through knowledge acquisition. The interdependence of these outcomes emphasizes the importance of ongoing investment in digital literacy programmes, particularly in rural and underserved areas to promote inclusive growth and development.

5. Success Stories and Best Practices

Digital literacy programmes in India have become essential initiatives designed to address the digital divide, especially in rural and marginalised communities. These programmes employ diverse training models and strategies to guarantee sustainability and effectiveness. An analysis of successful digital literacy initiatives identifies several critical factors that contribute to their effectiveness. An initiative to enhance digital literacy among 60 million individuals in rural India is the *Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan Yojana*. This initiative is a component of the larger *Digital India campaign*, aimed at improving access to government services via digital platforms, thus minimising paperwork and enhancing efficiency in service delivery (Gautam et al., 2022). The *NDLM* is significant, having trained millions to utilise digital devices and engage with e-governance services (Hassan & Mirza, 2021).

Large-scale programmes highlight the significance of government support in promoting digital literacy, as they supply essential resources and infrastructure for extensive training initiatives. Effective training models exhibit adaptability and inclusivity. It is recommended to incorporate digital literacy into academic curricula across all educational levels, for ensuring that students develop essential digital skills from an early age (Susanty, 2024). Community-based approaches, implemented by local organisations and public libraries, have demonstrated effectiveness in improving digital literacy among diverse populations (Detlor & Julien, 2020). These programmes frequently utilise local knowledge and resources, enhancing their relevance and accessibility for participants. The sustainability of digital literacy programmes is a critical aspect. Effective initiatives typically integrate ongoing assessment and feedback systems, to respond to the changing requirements of learners.

The CSC e-Governance Services India Limited has implemented a comprehensive ICT literacy programme that trains individuals and evaluates the impact of this training on their proficiency in using digital tools effectively (Joseph et

al., 2017). Furthermore, the integration of digital literacy training with other educational forms, including financial and health literacy, fosters a comprehensive approach that encompasses various dimensions of empowerment (Nedungadi et al., 2018). The interconnectedness of digital skills enhances their relevance in daily life, resulting in increased participant engagement and programme sustainability. The significance of local languages and culturally relevant content is paramount. Training programmes that incorporate local languages and culturally relevant materials are more effective in engaging marginalised populations (Radovanoviæ et al., 2020). This approach fosters inclusivity and aids in establishing trust and rapport with the community, which is essential for the long-term success of digital literacy initiatives. Successful digital literacy programmes in India are characterised by robust governmental support, flexible training models, ongoing evaluation, with an emphasis on cultural relevance. The elements function synergistically to establish sustainable initiatives that empower individuals and communities, thereby contributing to a more digitally literate society.

6. Policy and Institutional Support

Enhancing government support: The effectiveness of digital literacy initiatives such as the *Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan Yojana* and the *NDLM* highlight the necessity for ongoing policy-driven backing from the Indian government. Policies must prioritise the enhancement of resources, infrastructure, and outreach in underserved regions to facilitate greater access to digital training for citizens.

Integration of digital literacy into national education policy: For sustainable impact, it is essential to incorporate digital literacy into formal education systems across all levels. The integration of digital skills into school and vocational curricula, as outlined in the National Education Policy (NEP), will facilitate the early acquisition of essential digital competencies by future generations.

Public-private partnerships: Promoting public-private partnerships is critical for securing the funding, infrastructure, and technology required for extensive digital literacy initiatives. Partnerships with technology firms, non-governmental organisations, and municipal authorities can foster innovation and enhance the implementation of digital literacy initiatives nationwide.

Continuous evaluation and monitoring mechanisms: Institutional support must encompass the creation of mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and feedback to adjust training programmes according to changing needs. This will guarantee that

digital literacy initiatives stay pertinent and adaptable to the challenges encountered by diverse communities.

7. Gaps in Existing Research and Programmes for Digital Literacy in Adult Education, India

Insufficient attention to at-risk groups: Although numerous digital literacy initiatives strive to engage a wide demographic, there is a lack of comprehensive investigation into the unique requirements and obstacles encountered by at-risk populations, including women, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. There is a noticeable absence of customised strategies and programmes that tackle the specific obstacles faced by these populations, resulting in ongoing disparities in access to digital literacy.

Lack of longitudinal studies: There is a significant gap in research that examines the long-term effects of digital literacy programmes on employment, access to services, and overall empowerment. Many investigations concentrate on short-term results, resulting in a lack of insight into how digital literacy impacts individuals' lives in the long run and its enduring effects on socio-economic advancement.

Integration with vocational training: Existing programmes frequently fail to adequately integrate digital literacy with vocational training and skill development. Studies on effective models that integrate digital skills with practical vocational training are still scarce, which has the potential to improve employability and develop holistic educational pathways for adults.

Assessment of programme impact: Numerous current digital literacy programmes do not possess robust evaluation frameworks to thoroughly measure their effectiveness and overall impact. Standardised metrics and methodologies are essential for evaluating programme outcomes. This will enhance our understanding of effective strategies and support the replication of successful models in various contexts.

8. Future Directions for Digital Literacy in Adult Education, India

Future digital literacy initiatives should focus on creating targeted programmes that specifically cater to the needs of marginalised populations, such as women, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities. This entails the creation of inclusive training materials, the use of local languages, and the provision of essential resources to

foster equitable participation in digital literacy initiatives. The integration of digital literacy with vocational training is essential. It is imperative to create comprehensive programmes that combine these two areas effectively. Aligning digital skills with targeted occupational training can significantly improve employability, providing learners with a comprehensive skill set that addresses the needs of the changing job market. Future research efforts should prioritise conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term effects of digital literacy programmes on individuals and communities. This will yield important insights regarding the sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives, guiding improved programme design and policy decisions.

Collaboration and engagement among various stakeholders, including government agencies, private sector entities, NGOs, and local communities, will be essential for the effective implementation of digital literacy initiatives. Working together can improve resource sharing, foster innovation in training techniques, and promote the creation of culturally relevant materials, all of which can lead to more effective and sustainable digital literacy programmes.

By concentrating on these pathways, India can improve its digital literacy initiatives, making them more inclusive, pertinent, and effective in fostering socio-economic advancement for all citizens.

9. Conclusion

Digital literacy programmes in India have shown considerable promise in boosting employment prospects, increasing access to vital services, and empowering individuals with knowledge, especially in rural and marginalised communities. The achievements of programmes such as the *Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan Yojana* and the *NDLM* highlight the essential influence of governmental support in delivering the required infrastructure and resources to promote extensive digital literacy.

The diverse advantages of digital literacy encompass enhanced employability, especially as individuals develop crucial skills for operating digital devices and participating in the digital economy. Furthermore, digital literacy enhances access to government and healthcare services, promoting transparency and improving overall quality of life. Knowledge empowerment allows marginalised groups to engage actively in economic and social development, thereby enhancing social inclusion. Effective digital literacy initiatives feature flexible and inclusive training frameworks,

including community-orientated strategies and the incorporation of digital competencies into educational programmes. Furthermore, ongoing assessment, cultural significance, and the incorporation of local languages strengthen the sustainability of these programmes, ensuring they cater to the diverse needs of learners.

In summary, the relationship between digital literacy and factors such as employment, access to services, and empowerment highlights its essential contribution to advancing socio-economic development. In order to ensure that these initiatives persist in promoting inclusive growth, it is crucial to maintain ongoing investment, develop innovative training models and provide culturally relevant content to sustain their impact throughout India.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 94-103
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00007.5
ISSN 0019-5006

Recognition of Prior Learning in India: A Pathway to Realizing Lifelong Learning

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Abstract

This study analyses the execution and effects of Recognition of Prior Learning efforts in India as a means to enhance lifelong learning possibilities. The report examines the progression of RPL inside India's skills development framework, assesses its practical execution through significant initiatives such as Skill India and Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), and finds both accomplishments and ongoing obstacles. This paper contends that, despite notable advancements in formalising informal learning in India through the analysis of policy documents, programme outcomes, and comparative practices, considerable reforms in assessment methodologies, industry engagement, and institutional capacity are essential to fully harness its potential as a catalyst for lifelong learning.

Keywords: *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), lifelong learning, skill development, stakeholders, assessment methodologies.*

Introduction

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) has emerged as a crucial instrument in global education and skills development systems, facilitating the validation of knowledge acquired outside formal educational settings (Singh, 2015). The theoretical foundation of RPL may be linked to Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning, which serves as an ideological and theoretical basis for extensive research on RPL (Andersson, 2016). In industrialised nations, John Dewey's influence is frequently acknowledged in the discourse around the history of prior learning identification and

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validation. Dewey asserted, "Instruction should commence with the experiences that learners already possess." This experience and the skills acquired throughout it serve as the foundation for all subsequent learning (Dewey, 1938). The concept of "recognition of prior learning" is a process executed by qualified experts to identify, document, evaluate, and certify an individual's competencies acquired through formal, non-formal, or informal education, in alignment with established qualification criteria (ILO, 2023).

A significant portion of India's labour population is employed in the informal sector, acquiring skills through traditional apprenticeships or experiential learning settings. Recognition of RPL serves as a crucial connection between formal recognition systems and informally learnt skills. The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises the significance of RPL and designates it as an essential element in India's progression towards a knowledge economy characterised by continuous, accessible, and recognised learning (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Despite the high regard for RPL in India's skills development plan and its considerable potential to facilitate lifelong learning, a substantial knowledge gap persists about the optimal implementation of RPL to establish meaningful learning trajectories and enhance socioeconomic results. Rothboeck et al. (2018) emphasise that empirical evidence about the success of India's four-sector RPL pilot project, particularly in relation to labour market outcomes and advancement to higher education, is still scarce despite the significant expansion of RPL programmes.

As India undergoes economic transformation amidst rapid technological advancements and globalisation, lifelong learning has emerged as a critical focal point in Indian policy discourse. Approximately 93% of India's labour force is engaged in informal employment, rendering conventional education and training programmes inadequate to fulfil the skill development needs of this vast demographic (International Labour Organisation, 2022). By validating acquired skills via experience, RPL offers a pragmatic solution that establishes a foundation for continuous professional growth and education. Sharma and Choudhary (2021) see RPL as both an entry point and a sustaining mechanism for lifelong learning, especially for poor populations whose educational trajectories may have been disrupted or constrained by socioeconomic factors.

This study examines the disparity between the theoretical potential of RPL as a facilitator of lifelong learning and its practical use within India's diverse socioeconomic landscape. The study systematically analyses the operational mechanisms and

efficiency of RPL initiatives across India in promoting lifelong learning objectives. This study aims to elucidate the benefits and limitations of India's RPL system by an exhaustive examination of academic literature, policy instruments, and documented practices. The methodological approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder perspectives through critical study of official policy documents, scientific research publications, and recorded implementation tactics. The analytical results inform the study to formulate evidence-based recommendations for enhancing this fundamental aspect of the infrastructure that underpins national skill development.

Evolution of RPL in India's Policy Framework

The official acknowledgement of RPL within India's statutory framework is recent, although the notion of acknowledging informally acquired skills has historical roots in traditional apprenticeship systems. The National Skills Development Policy of 2009 marked the first significant emphasis on RPL, acknowledging the need to legitimise skills obtained through non-formal means (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2009). The establishment of the National Skills Qualification Framework (NSQF) in 2013 created a structured framework for the methodical execution of RPL by defining level-based competency criteria for evaluating prior learning (Mehrotra, 2019). The launch of the Skill India Mission in 2015 marked a significant milestone for the execution of RPL, incorporating RPL as a core component of the flagship Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY) programme (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2015).

The mission established clear objectives for RPL certification and allocated specific finances, signifying a shift from theoretical recognition to practical implementation. Kumar and Singh (2020) contend that this policy reform reflected a growing recognition that India's demographic dividend could only be realised through comprehensive skills recognition including both formal and informal learning pathways.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasised the significance of RPL in India's educational system by explicitly linking it to the concept of lifelong learning. The plan envisioned RPL as a component of a flexible educational framework facilitating "multiple entry and exit points" to promote lifelong learning throughout an individual's career (Ministry of Education, 2020). This was a significant advancement, positioning RPL not just as a skills certification instrument but as an essential component of an integrated lifelong learning framework (Pilz and Regel, 2021).

National Credit Framework

The NEP 2020 established a transformative framework for higher education, emphasising the importance of lifelong learning, flexible academic pathways, and the formal recognition of prior learners. RPL was regarded as an essential method to improve educational access for those who had gained skills via employment experience, community engagement, or vocational training. The NEP 2020 mandated the establishment of frameworks that allow individuals to get formal degrees based on demonstrated learning outcomes. Consequently, the National Credit Framework (NCrF) was instituted to provide a structured system for the allocation of credits across various forms of learning, including academic, vocational, and experiential education. The NCrF promotes credit accumulation and transferability, therefore allowing individuals to transition seamlessly between job and education. The government has included RPL into the NCrF, facilitating the evaluation and assignment of academic credits for informally acquired competencies, hence improving access to higher education for a diverse student population. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has recently issued guidelines to facilitate the implementation of RPL in higher education institutions (HEIs).

These standards create a thorough framework for assessing prior learning, determining credit equivalency, and ensuring quality assurance in RPL procedures. The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), established in alignment with NEP 2020, aims to enable credit transfers, allowing individuals to accumulate and utilise RPL-based credits for obtaining formal degrees. Despite these advancements, challenges persist in the widespread use of RPL. Standardising evaluation protocols for diverse learning experiences, preserving the integrity of RPL certifications, and enhancing acceptance across corporations and educational institutions are critical concerns. Moreover, awareness of RPL and its benefits must be enhanced among potential beneficiaries, particularly informal sector workers and industry professionals.

Implementation Models and Key Initiatives

The implementation of RPL in India has employed many approaches, each customised to address specific industrial needs and target populations. The principal implementation method has been through PMKVY, which utilised a three-stage RPL process: candidate mobilisation and pre-screening, orientation and bridge training to address skill deficits, and evaluation leading to certification (National Skill Development Corporation, 2022). Between 2016 and 2022, the RPL segment of PMKVY certified almost 4 million persons in diverse sectors including construction,

agriculture, domestic work, and manufacturing (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2023).

The PMKVY implementation model includes three distinct approaches for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL): camp-based, employer-premises, and RPL centres. The camp-based technique involves creating temporary assessment centres inside areas with a high concentration of skilled workers, demonstrating notable effectiveness in reaching rural and semi-urban populations (Sharma et al., 2019). The employer-premises approach emphasises employees in organised sectors, conducting assessments at job locations in collaboration with employers.

The RPL centres are permanent entities often established by Sector Skill Councils to provide continuous assessment services for certain enterprises (National Skill Development Corporation, 2022). Alongside PMKVY, other sector-specific Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) programmes have been established.

The Construction Skill Development Council of India (CSDCI) has established targeted RPL programmes for construction workers, while the Healthcare Sector Skill Council has developed specialised assessment methods for healthcare professionals with informal training (Agrawal and Agrawal, 2021). Additionally, state governments have launched supplemental programmes such as the Delhi government's "Mission Buniyaad," which incorporates RPL components for informal sector workers (Government of Delhi, 2019). The digital transformation of RPL implementation is an emerging trend, evidenced by the introduction of the Skill India Digital site in 2021, which has streamlined the registration, assessment, and certification processes (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2022). Goel et al. (2023) observe that this digital integration has enhanced transparency and accessibility; nonetheless, obstacles to digital literacy remain for some demographic groups.

Assessment Methodologies and Quality Assurance

The reliability of RPL depends on strong evaluation methods and quality assurance systems. In India, assessment methodologies have transitioned from mostly theoretical evaluations to practical, demonstration-based examinations that correspond with occupation-specific National Occupational Standards (NOS) (National Skill Development Corporation, 2022). Assessment often integrates practical demonstrations (70%) with theoretical knowledge evaluation (30%). However, the specific ratio differs among industries (Pilz and Regel, 2021).

Quality assurance in India's RPL system functions at many tiers. The National Council for Vocational Education and Training (NCVET), founded in 2018, functions as the principal regulator for RPL certification, tasked with the approval of qualification standards and the accreditation of assessment organisations (Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, 2021). At the sector level, Sector Skill Councils formulate assessment procedures and educate evaluators, while independent assessment firms do the assessments to guarantee objectivity (National Skill Development Corporation, 2022).

Notwithstanding these systemic protections, research reveals ongoing quality concerns. According to Mehrotra (2019), assessor capability exhibits considerable variability, and the uneven implementation of evaluation criteria undermines dependability. Sharma and Choudhary (2021) also cite shortcomings in assessment systems, noting that they inadequately capture the contextual knowledge and adaptive abilities inherent in informal learning. Pilz and Regel (2021) further highlight the challenge of maintaining assessment rigor while ensuring accessibility, noting that overly complex assessment processes may deter potential candidates, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Impact on Lifelong Learning Pathways

The influence of RPL on promoting lifelong learning in India may be assessed through many dimensions: labour market results, educational advancement, and personal empowerment. According to research conducted by the National Skill Development Corporation (2022), RPL certification has had favourable employment results, with 32% of certified individuals seeing income rises and 22% obtaining more solid job contracts. Nonetheless, these advantages demonstrate considerable sectoral disparity, since regulated businesses such as healthcare and electrical services have a greater acknowledgement of RPL certification compared to uncontrolled ones (Agrawal and Agrawal, 2021).

The educational advancement route enabled by RPL is still underdeveloped. The NSQF theoretically facilitates vertical movement from RPL certification to formal educational credentials; however, the practical execution of these paths has been constrained. Kumar and Singh (2020) note that few educational institutions have implemented clear credit recognition systems for RPL-certified applicants, limiting the reciprocal exchange between practical and academic learning typical of advanced lifelong learning systems.

The psychological and social effects of RPL certification constitute a substantial although sometimes neglected aspect. Qualitative research conducted by Sharma et al. (2019) reveals that RPL certification produces significant psychological advantages, such as enhanced self-confidence and professional identity among previously overlooked competent professionals. These psychological consequences may stimulate ongoing learning engagement; however, long-term studies examining such patterns are limited in the Indian setting.

Challenges and Limitations

Notwithstanding encouraging advancements, India's RPL system encounters significant obstacles that hinder its efficacy as a facilitator of lifelong learning. Awareness and accessibility constitute fundamental obstacles, as research reveals a lack of understanding of RPL options, especially among distant and marginalised populations (National Skill Development Corporation, 2022). Administrative intricacies and paperwork prerequisites further hinder accessibility, particularly for applicants with restricted literacy or internet access (Sharma and Choudhary, 2021).

The evaluation approach poses an additional considerable challenge. Contemporary methodologies frequently fail to appropriately represent the contextual and adaptable abilities inherent in informal learning, prioritising standardised capabilities that may not accurately reflect the many expressions of skills in informal environments (Mehrotra, 2019). Goel et al. (2023) contend that this evaluative restriction restricts RPL's capacity to comprehensively acknowledge the profound learning inherent in traditional knowledge systems and communal behaviours.

The sustainability of RPL systems is a continual problem. Significant reliance on government financing prompts concerns over long-term sustainability, but minimal employer investment indicates persistent doubt about the usefulness of certification (Kumar and Singh, 2020). The lack of a self-sustaining financing model jeopardises the continuity and scalability of RPL projects, potentially compromising their function in facilitating lifelong learning paths.

The fragmentation of the RPL environment hinders the advancement of lifelong learning. Numerous certifying bodies, varying quality standards, and restricted interoperability across certification systems provide navigation difficulties for learners aiming to accumulate certifications (Pilz and Regel, 2021). This fragmentation undermines the integration concept fundamental to effective lifelong learning systems

Discussion

The study underscores a critical disjunction in the execution of RPL inside India's vast informal sector and its aspirations to evolve into a knowledge economy. Despite RPL being recognised as a crucial tool for lifelong learning under policy frameworks, including the 2009 National Skills Development Policy and the National Education Policy 2020, its implementation has not fully realised this potential.

The study challenge examines the gap between the theoretical promise of RPL and its actual effectiveness in creating meaningful learning pathways. Despite millions obtaining certification through initiatives like PMKVY, the data indicates that RPL has predominantly functioned as a skills certification tool rather than as a fundamental component of a comprehensive lifelong learning framework. The current evaluation methods fail to sufficiently reflect the contextual and adaptive capabilities intrinsic to informal learning, prioritising standardised competencies that may not accurately represent the many manifestations of skills in non-formal environments. The difficulties of this execution is particularly significant given India's socioeconomic context, where traditional educational institutions inadequately meet the demands of the 93% of workers in the informal sector. The research suggests that while RPL theoretically promotes vertical mobility within the NSQF, few educational institutions have established explicit credit recognition systems for RPL-certified individuals, thereby limiting the crucial connection between experiential and academic learning pathways.

The fragmentation of the RPL environment, marked by several certifying bodies and varying quality standards, creates navigational difficulties that hinder the necessary integration for successful lifelong learning. This is compounded by sustainability challenges, since the substantial reliance on government funding without enough employer backing threatens the viability of RPL initiatives. The psychological impact of certification - enhanced self-confidence and professional identity among previously disregarded capable workers - suggests the potential for ongoing engagement in learning. However, without addressing the systemic shortcomings in assessment quality, industry recognition, and the incorporation of educational routes, RPL is expected to remain peripheral rather than central to India's lifelong learning goals.

To facilitate RPL's effective contribution to India's transition to a knowledge economy, research indicates that significant reforms are required in assessment methodologies, institutional capabilities, and system integration to create genuine pathways that acknowledge existing skills while fostering lifelong learning among citizens.

Conclusion

The RPL is a crucial method for promoting lifelong learning in India, particularly in light of the country's substantial informal sector and diverse educational practices. Notwithstanding significant progress in the development of RPL frameworks and the execution of certification programmes, more modifications are required to effectively use RPL's promise as a driver of lifelong learning.

Despite the National Skills Qualification Framework providing an institutional foundation for RPL, concerns persist around industry acknowledgement, assessment integrity, and the actual educational advancement facilitated by RPL certification. The principal recommendations from this analysis include: strengthening assessment methodologies to better capture contextual and adaptive skills; increasing industry engagement to improve certification recognition and sustainability; creating strong links between RPL and formal education through clear credit recognition; expanding digital infrastructure while ensuring accessible alternatives; and developing comprehensive monitoring systems to assess long-term learning and employment outcomes.

As India advances towards a knowledge economy, the significance of RPL in certifying diverse learning pathways will become increasingly crucial for economic competitiveness and social inclusiveness. By addressing current limitations and using established frameworks, India may develop a RPL system that certifies existing competencies and encourages continuous learning, so fostering lifelong education for all citizens.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 104-118
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00008.7
ISSN 0019-5006

Prison Education as a Tool for Rehabilitation and Reformation in Indian Prisons: A Policy Analysis

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Abstract

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) states that "Access to education for all prisoners is one of the best ways of ensuring that upon release they will be better able to successfully reintegrate into society."

In India, the primary focus on prisoners has conventionally been punishment-oriented instead of emphasis on their rehabilitation because of severe overcrowding and lack of resources. The imperialist-era Prison Act of 1894 was in force in India until 2023, which had the least number of recommendations for reform and rehabilitation of prisoners. The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) conducted a comprehensive review of this old Act of Prison Management demanding a more humane and modern approach. This initiative ultimately developed the Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act of 2023 (Model Prisons Act 2023). The primary aim of this new act is to reform prison administration and to facilitate the reintegration of inmates into society as law-abiding citizens. On the other hand, the latest comprehensive guidelines are also provided by the Ministry of Home Affairs as Model Prison Manual 2016 to improve and standardize the prison administration across India with a special focus on reformation and rehabilitation measures, including prison education and correctional training programmes to provide inmates with learning opportunities for the improvement in terms of courage and self-assurance for their successful reintegration in society. However, the Prison Manual and Prisons Act are prepared and formulated with the vision of welfare and reforms for prisoners but the successful execution of these policies is the matter of this research paper. This paper will try to analyse the gaps between policy documents and their implementations on ground.

This research paper provides a comprehensive policy analysis of prison education and correctional training programmes as a tool for existing rehabilitation programmes within Indian context, examining its historical development, current practices, and

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potential for reform. The method of policy analysis would be used to critically examine the relevant policy documents.

Keywords: *Prison education, correctional training programmes, reformation and rehabilitation, Prisons Act 2023, Model Prison Manual 2016*

Introduction

Prison education is an essential part of the correctional system as it gives prisoners a chance to enhance their skills, get back on their feet and successfully reintegrate into society. The best way to reduce crime is by giving people a chance for a better life, and take it as the foundation of that opportunity (Alexander, 2010). Education within correctional facilities is one way to reduce systemic inequalities in the Indian setting, where a large proportion of the prison population is from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. According to the Prison Statistics India 2021 report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), 25.2% of prisoners in India are illiterate and over 40.2% have education below 10th grade (GOI, 2021: xiii).

This data highlights the pressing need for structured prison educational programmes to bridge these gaps. In the colonial period, the prison system in India was based on a punitive philosophy with the belief in changing criminal behaviour through punishment rather than protecting human rights by implementing the reformative system. The Prison Act of 1894 established the framework for prison management, but it did not provide meaningful provisions for the education or welfare of prisoners. The importance of education as a means of rehabilitation has been emphasized for years by various prison reform groups, including the Justice Mulla Committee (1983) and the Justice Krishna Iyer Committee (1987).

The 2016 Model Prison Manual, which specifically acknowledges education and vocational training as essential components of the rehabilitation process, was adopted due to these recommendations (MPM 2016). Today's educational initiatives in Indian prisons include everything from basic literacy and numeracy programmes, often run in partnership with the National Literacy Mission (NLM), to higher education programmes supported by organizations such as the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU). These initiatives are further supported by vocational training that equips inmates with employable skills in areas such as computer literacy, carpentry, and tailoring.

Such programmes generate long-term social benefits by reducing recidivism rates in addition to improving offenders' employability and self-esteem. People who face incarceration often have low earnings even before they enter prison. This situation worsens after release as their income drops further and they face many problems in finding stable jobs, legal restrictions and lack of opportunities to make reintegration difficult. The emphasis is on the need for effective policies to support job training and employment to break the cycles of poverty and marginalization (Looney & Turner, 2018). This paper tries to discuss the recommendations and implementations of policy documents in current state of prison education of India, as well as its difficulties and possibilities for change. It emphasizes that additional financial assistance, legislative changes, and community collaborations are required to create a more effective and inclusive system of correctional education in Indian prisons. The successful reintegration of incarcerated individuals into mainstream society and the humanization of India's judicial system can be achieved by paying attention to the educational demands of prisoners.

Research Methodology

The method of qualitative policy analysis has been employed to understand how the framework for Prison reforms and prison education has been designed and further major gaps in the policy and its implementation are identified. The major policy documents, The Prison Act 1894, Revised Prison Act of 2023, and the latest Model Prison Manual 2016, have been reviewed and analyzed to critically evaluate the policy contents and identify gaps in execution through thematic analysis of policy's text. The Prisons Act of 1894 was the first legislation for the administration and management of prisons in India. Since then, various recommendations of committees, manuals and latest Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act of 2023 (Prisons Act 2023) have come into force. Hence, the context for this paper is the enactment of the Prisons Act 2023 and the recommendations of Model Prison Manual 2016, which will help us to understand policy shifts in the framework for Prison education and reforms.

Conceptual Framework: Prison Education for Rehabilitation of Prisoners

Prison education creates a network between social justice, correctional reforms, and the rehabilitation of prisoners. Education is grounded in the belief that it is a transformative tool that addresses the underlying factors contributing to poverty, lack of skills, criminal behaviours, and limited opportunities. According to academics, giving prisoners access to education enables them to think critically, develop, and

reintegrate into society with a more optimistic perspective. To connect the concept of prison education with rehabilitation, prison education can be seen as a part and form of rehabilitation (Behan, 2014: 20).

In the Indian context, prison education aligns with constitutional values and international human rights standards, emphasizing the rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated individuals into society. Education in prisons is viewed as a fundamental human right under international frameworks such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules, 2015). In India, the right to education is enshrined in Article 21A of the constitution, which underscores the importance of education for all, including incarcerated individuals.

The primary goal of prison education is to rehabilitate offenders by equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to reintegrate into society as law-abiding citizens. Rehabilitation has gone through many manifestations over the centuries, including penitentiary, therapeutic, social learning and rights orientated models (Roth et.al, 2017). The Model Prison Manual (2016) explicitly advocates for educational and vocational training programmes as part of a comprehensive approach to prisoner reformation (GOI, MPM, 2016).

A significant number of the population in Indian prisons comes from marginalized and disadvantaged communities, many of whom lack access to employment or quality educational opportunities. Vocational training enhances inmates' employability, reducing economic dependency and encouraging lawful livelihoods (IGNOU, 2020). Prison education addresses systemic inequities by providing inmates with literacy programmes, vocational training, and higher education opportunities, thereby empowering them to break free from cycles of poverty and crime (NCRB, 2021). A study published in the Journal of Correctional Education revealed that inmates who engage in correctional education while being incarcerated have a higher likelihood of securing employment post-release and also chances of higher wages in comparison to non-participants (Steurer et.al., 2003: 14).

The tendency of repetitive crime is often associated with the criminal attitudes of ex-offenders, and this nature of recidivism generally drags them back to the dark cycles of punishments and prisons. Many researchers have emphasized the positive role of prison education in modifications on the nature of recidivism among prisoners. Research by the RAND corporation found that inmates who participate in educational programmes are 43% less likely to return to prison as compared to those who do not engage in such opportunities (Davis et al., 2013: xvi).

Types of Prison Education and Correctional Training Programmes in India

In India, prison education and correctional training programmes aim to rehabilitate inmates by addressing their educational and vocational needs along with life skills development for reintegration into society. These programmes are guided by the Model Prison Manual (2016) and enacted by The Prisons Act of 2023 issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, which emphasizes education as a fundamental right for prisoners. Educational initiatives often focus on basic literacy, as a significant percentage of prisoners in India come from marginalized backgrounds with limited formal education. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2021 data, approximately 27% of prisoners in India have not completed primary education. To address this, literacy programmes are conducted in collaboration with organizations like the National Literacy Mission (NLM 1988).

Prisons partner with institutions like the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) and Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) for secondary and higher education. IGNOU operates study centres within several prisons, offering diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate courses tailored to the needs of incarcerated individuals (IGNOU, 2020). Vocational training is essential for inmates to provide them with employable skills. These programmes include carpentry, tailoring, weaving, plumbing, and computer training. States like Tamil Nadu and Delhi have been exceptionally proactive, introducing innovative vocational programmes, including horticulture and bakery training, to help inmates generate income post-release.

Many Indian prisons provide inmates with counselling and rehabilitation programmes, including anger management, drug addiction treatment, and mental health support. Like some prisons integrate cultural and moral education, including yoga and meditation, to promote mental well-being and behavioural change. The Art of Living's Prison SMART programme has transformed the lives of thousands of inmates around the world. This program heals the victim and empowers them to get back to mainstream society and make an honest living. This foundation is actively working for the transformation of prisoners in India and the Art of Living Foundation's Prison Smart initiative has been implemented in several states to help inmates manage stress and anger in productive directions.

Historical Evolution of Prison Policies in India

The Prisons Act of 1894 is one of India's oldest policy documents governing the management and administration of prisons. The primary focus of this policy document was on security, discipline, and management of prisons with special emphasis on

punitive measures. This Act was progressive for that time and provided provisions related to staff duties, prison officers, classification of prisoners, health standards, and sanitation issues. While it laid the foundational framework for prison administration, the Act was primarily punitive rather than reformative, reflecting the colonial approach to incarceration. The Act has widely been criticized for its outdated approach and lack of emphasis on prisoner rehabilitation and reformation.

As the shortcomings of the Prison Act of 1894 came to light over time, demands for change increased. Committees such as the Justice Krishna Iyer Committee (1987) and Justice Mulla Committee (1983) stressed the shortcomings and recommended a change, for a restorative strategy. The All India Committee on Jail Reforms (1980-1983), chaired by Justice A.N. Mulla, emphasized the need for comprehensive prison reforms in India. Primarily these included the establishment of a national policy on prisons, the modernization of a prison infrastructure, and the introduction of rehabilitation programmes focusing on education and vocational training to facilitate the reintegration of prisons into society. The committee also advocated for the induction of more women in the police force, recognizing their special role in handling women and child offenders. In 1987, the Justice Krishna Iyer Committee was appointed to study the conditions of women prisoners. It highlights the importance of education and skill development within the prison system, with the aim of transforming prisons into reformative academic centres rather than detention centres.

The Model Prison Manual 2016 and The Prisons Act 2023 are both aimed at reforming and modernizing prison administration in India, but they differ in scope, legal standing, and specific objectives. Whereas the Model Prison Manual, 2016 is a guideline document intended to standardize prison administration across states, it lacks the force of law, leaving its adoption and enforcement to the discretion of individual states. The Prisons Act 2023, on the other hand, is a comprehensive legislative framework designed to replace the outdated Prisons Act of 1894. It provides binding legal provisions to enforce reforms, ensuring greater uniformity across states.

Model Prison Manual 2016

The Model Prison Manual 2016 of India was developed by the Ministry of Home Affairs with the aim to modernize India's prison system and to align with contemporary correctional principles. While it represents a significant shift from punitive to reformative justice, several aspects, especially concerning prison education and correctional training programmes, invite both appreciation and criticism.

The Manual emphasizes prisoner rehabilitation through education, vocational training, and skill development by advocating for compulsory education amongst all adult prisoners to ensure functional literacy by the end of their sentence. Prisons are encouraged to partner with state education departments and adult literacy organizations to conduct literacy drives (GOI, 2016:163). Provision for prison education generally incorporates adult literacy programmes, primary, secondary and higher education (often in collaboration with institutions like NIOS, State Boards, and IGNOU), and library access (GOI, 2016: 160). This aligns with the belief that education is a key to reducing recidivism. The manual also suggests integrating prison education with the state's educational system to ensure continuity post-release.

This Manual is much focused for skill-building programmes tailored to local employment opportunities, enabling inmates to secure livelihoods post-release. The introduction of computer literacy, crafts, and trade-specific training reflects efforts to integrate inmates into modern society. This manual has recommended giving certificates to the inmates after completion of these courses. These skill oriented courses can enhance their employability after release. Encouraging partnerships with NGOs, professionals, and psychologists, the Manual takes a more inclusive approach to reform (GOI, 2016). This holistic view includes counselling and life skills training alongside academic and vocational education.

The Model Prisons Act 2023

The Ministry of Home Affairs also reviewed 'The Prisoners Act of 1900' and 'The Transfer of Prisoners Act of 1950' along with 'The Prisons Act of 1894. Relevant provisions of these important Acts have also been included in the 'Model Prisons Act of 2023.' The Governments of States and Union Territories have full autonomy to adopt the recommendations of this act in their jurisdictions with essential modifications which they may consider as necessary and also repeal the existing above three Acts in their jurisdictions.

The Model Prisons Act of 2023 is a significant shift in India's approach to prison system with more emphasis on reformation and rehabilitation. This policy document recommended this provision mainly through structured prison education and correctional training programmes. This modern legislative framework addresses the lacunae of the outdated Prisons Act of 1894, aligning prison management with contemporary correctional philosophies. The Act of 2023 codified the recommendations of Model Prison Manual 2016 and underscores the importance of education in rehabilitation and integration of prisoners, advocating compulsory

education for illiterate prisoners and encouraging secondary education and higher studies for the prisoners having low educational levels. It mandates the establishment of structured educational programmes within prisons to fulfil the need of this time, facilitating access to academic resources and promoting collaborations with external educational institutions. Vocational training is also a focal point, with the Act recommending the creation of skill development centres offering courses in trades such as carpentry, tailoring, and computer applications.

This Model Act has provisions for reformation, rehabilitation and integration of prisoners in the society. The provision for 'Welfare Programs for Prisoners' and 'After-Care and Rehabilitation Services', are integral part of institutional care and are recommended in this act[2]. Some important and under addressed provisions of 2016 Manual as technological integration, such as video conferencing for appearances in courts, and digital record keeping are also focused in the Prisons Act 2023. These initiatives aim to enhance inmates' employability upon release, facilitating their reintegration into society.

This Act of 2023 also recommended for the creation of prison development boards to ensure regular monitoring, improvement and the periodic inspections by judicial and human rights authorities. Beyond education and vocational training, the Act introduces comprehensive rehabilitation and aftercare services. It emphasizes the need for individualized rehabilitation plans, psychological counselling, and substance abuse treatment programmes. The Act also underlines the importance of aftercare services, assisting released prisoners in securing employment and housing, thereby reducing recidivism rates. For monitoring of post-release behaviour it emphasizes structured follow-up programmes to prevent recidivism.

(GOI, 2023: [Chapter, XX]).

Discussion and Analysis

(i) Gaps and Challenges in Prison Education as Tool of Reformation and Rehabilitation

There are various gaps in rulebook of policy documents and the implementations of the provisions. The Model Prison Manual 2016 and The Prisons Act 2023 both provide detailed guidelines for the management, administration, and reformation of Indian prisons, focusing on the welfare of inmates, rehabilitation, and modernization, but its implementation across various states remains inconsistent. The Prisons Act

[2]Unstarred Question number3007 (Lok Sabha dated 8 August 2023), available at https://www.mha.gov.in/MHA1/Par2017/pdfs/par2023-pdfs/LS-08082023/3007.pdf

2023 transforms the aspirations of the Model Prison Manual 2016 into actionable legal mandates. The Act represents the next step in institutionalizing reforms and ensuring a standardized, humane, and rehabilitative approach to prison administration across India. While the 2016 Manual served as a policy guide, the 2023 Act ensures enforceability and uniformity, paving the way for more consistent and impactful reform efforts.

(ii) Overcrowding in Prisons

The latest data of NCRB 2022 in "Prison Statistics India" report revealed the poor conditions of overcrowding in Indian prisons. According to this report, the occupancy rate of Indian prisons is 131%, which means they have 131% inmates of their actual capacity with 5l73,220 inmates against a capacity of 4,36,266 (MHA, 2022: 20). It shows the major issue of overcrowding in Indian prisons, among which around 75.8% are under trials (MHA, 2022: 33). This overcrowding makes the situation very difficult to implement the provisions of [prison policies adequately. Prisoners face several issues related to living conditions, food, health care, late trials and many more. This overcrowding also affects the programmes for reformation of prisoners, including educational and vocational programmes due to the lack of space, material and staff to conduct them efficiently

(iii) Inadequate Educational and Correctional Training Programmes

Although the new Prisons Act 2023 and Model Prison Manual 2016, are much focused on the educational and vocational training programmes for the prisoners, these lack in the number and quality as per the demands of the prisons and are not appropriately connected with the market demands. Some NGOs like India Vision Foundation, Aasra, Divyajyoti, etc., work for the welfare for prisoners in various ways like education, vocational training, and rehabilitation. However, access to these facilities is limited in many prisons. There is also a lack of skilled facilitators to execute these educational and vocational programmes in the prisons. Either facilitators are not appointed; or sometimes, they don't have proper training and interest for the quality execution of the programmes. Policy documents also recommend free legal aid and legal literacy programmes for prisoners to protect their fundamental rights and take the necessary action to get justice, but these programmes are insufficient in number.

(iv) Insufficient Resources

It is believed that "An investment in prison education is an investment in public safety, because education has been shown to be one of the most effective ways to reduce recidivism" (Vacca 2004), but the budget allocated for prison education in India is little as per demand of time. In 2022-2023, the expenditure on prison education in India was 9.91 crore rupees (MHA, 2022: 279), which accounted for just 0.4% of the total prison expenditure of 2,528.45 crore rupees. The total budget allocated to prisons across the country was 8,725 crore rupees. Although the budget increased from 6,740.6 crore rupees in 2020-2021 to 8,725 crore rupees in 2022-2023, only a small fraction (0.4%) was designated for prison education. Due to limited financial resources, the implementation of recommendations for prison education, trained staff, improved infrastructure, study materials, and other necessary facilities could not be adequately achieved.

(v) Insufficient Psychological and Mental Support

Prisons are considered places of darkness and depression. Prisoners need proper psychological counselling and emotional support to come out of their trauma. Both policy documents are concerned with the mental health and well-being of the prisoners and recommend psychological counselling and support services for the prisoners to successfully reintegrate into society (GOI, 2016; GOI, 2023). However, most prisons lack such mental health services. This gap exacerbates the issues of anxiety, violence, self-harm, and sometimes suicide in prisons. Even though mental health services are available in prisons, the staff-to-prisoner ratio is inadequate, leading to insufficient attention and inadequate counseling and mental support for individuals. While policies provide for de-addiction programs and behavioural therapies, their implementation is minimal, often limited to a few prisons or existing only on paper.

(vi) Lack of Accountability and Monitoring in Prisons

Both the policy documents suggested executing the grievance redressal system and monitoring bodies for the smooth management of the Indian prisons but this recommendation could not be implemented with same force, in all the states. Some prisons independently set up monitoring bodies, but due to lack of resources and the necessary authority; they could not carry out effective oversight. There is lack of transparency and public accountability in prison administration, thus it has led to poor implementation of policies.

(vii) Variances in Adoption of Policies

Prisons in India are a subject of state that comes under the seventh schedule of India. Thus, state governments are responsible for the management and administration of prisons. The Model Prison Manual 2016 and The Prisons Act 2023 - both the policy documents give various recommendations related to the welfare, reformation, and rehabilitation of prisoners in Indian prisons. However, states are not legally bound to implement all the recommendations with the same force and interests. Some states have adopted and integrated these policy recommendations effectively. In contrast, others have limited adoption of the same due to lack of resources, political agendas of states, administrative reasons, or due to regional disparities.

(viii) Resistant to Reform

Policy documents reflect the shifting of the punitive model of punishment to the rehabilitative model of punishment through their recommendations, for reforming and rehabilitating prisoners to integrate them back successfully into society. Nevertheless, prisons are often taken as institutions of punishment rather than reform. Prison staff and sometimes prisoners themselves are not mentally prepared for reformative activities like education or any correctional and vocational activities. This unsupportive attitude of prisoners and staff put the steps of reforms, back in conventional mode.

Suggestions and Recommendations

(1) Establishment of Prison Education Department

There is a lacuna that Indian prisons still do not have any specific department for formulating and regulating prison education and correctional training programmes. There should be a proper mandate for prison education programmes nationwide to establish curriculum standards, the nature of programmes, the appointment of trained teachers, providing learning materials, and proper evaluation. This department should be aligned with national educational agencies like IGNOU, NIOS, state boards, and universities to provide prisoners with primary, secondary, and higher education. There should be a structured National Prison Educational Policy to ensure education for each inmate, as education is a fundamental right for prisoners.

(2) Focus on Skill Development Programmes

Employment and fulfilment of financial needs are the major obstacles to the reintegration of prisoners back into society after coming out of prison. Correctional training programmes should focus on skill development in collaboration with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and private sector organizations. These skills and trades-based programmes should be designed according to market demands. Diplomas and certificates should be offered to the prisoners in trades like tailoring, agriculture, carpentry, and plumbing, along with market-driven training for employment assurance. Financial literacy and small business management programmes should be organized to help with the entrepreneurial training of prisoners.

(3) Integration of Technology in Education

The prison education system should be integrated with online platforms to connect prisoners with mainstream education; for this purpose, the prison department should install secure e-learning systems and provide access to offline digital libraries, for example, with pre-loaded educational content and classes. Prisons should make fruitful partnerships with platforms like SWAYAM, NIOS, and other online education initiatives to tailor courses for inmates. Prisoners should receive basic IT training and digital literacy programmes for immersive learning experiences.

(4) Promote Functional Literacy and Basic Education

Literacy campaigns among prisoners should be organized to enhance and promote the functional literacy needed for day-to-day requirements like health, financial, media, computer, or document literacy. This concept of functional literacy should also be included in the prisoners' basic education curriculum. As education is a fundamental right and prisoners have the right to access it, the prison administration should conduct mandatory literacy programmes for illiterate inmates. Prisons should come together with the National Literacy Mission to fulfil the requirements of resources and to train facilitators. National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) provides free education to inmates to complete their basic schooling. However, this initiative needs to be implemented more effectively in each prison, for every prisoner in India. Basic education should be provided in the regional language or mother tongue so prisoners can understand and learn effortlessly.

(5) Opportunities for Higher Education

This vulnerable group of society should be encouraged to increase their educational level by providing better opportunities for secondary and higher education. Prison administration should facilitate enrolment of eligible inmates in various learning programmes through correspondence and distance learning in universities like IGNOU. Other institutions and universities like IGNOU should also come forward to provide better educational opportunities by introducing helpful courses based upon legal rights, paralegal services, or community service programmes for the prisoners, which can help this section to successfully reintegrate into society. Academic research should also be promoted for the inmates. Universities should also provide prisoners with lecturers, trained staff, and educational sessions to create their interests and enhance their knowledge in particular subjects and courses. Scholarships should be awarded to eligible inmates, and there should be a strong provision to connect them with mainstream education so that they can complete their courses and respective degrees after getting released from prison.

There should be proper access to the study materials, and examination centres should be prison-specific to give prisoners remarkable confidence and mental comfort when appearing in exams. The address on the educational certificates should not be of that particular prison, as it creates problems in obtaining jobs after coming out and causes mental trauma to the prisoners.

(6) Counselling and Life Skills based Programmes

Prisons are places of darkness and anxiety, which make it impossible to maintain mental balance for prisoners. Psychological and moral education should be provided by introducing ethical teachings from various religions and philosophies to stabilize the mental conditions of prisoners. Regular meditation and yoga programmes should be organized in prisons to improve the prisoners' mental well-being and self-discipline. Counselling and motivational sessions by trained counsellors should be organized in prisons for the issues of anger management, anxiety, depression, suicidal tendencies, and conflict resolution among prisoners. Professional psychologists and social workers should be engaged in psychological and educational counselling for the prisoners.

(7) Post-Release Support

There is a strong need for after-care programmes for prisoners to make life easy and successful after re-entering in society. Retired teachers, social workers,

and volunteers should be engaged in educating and supporting the prisoners. The peer teaching concept is also helpful in encouraging educated inmates to teach and guide fellow prisoners. Support from government agencies and NGOs to obtain jobs, complete their education, and gain financial support to establish small business setups is a boon for re-establishing prisoners into society. Prisoners should also receive employment placement assistance that links trained inmates with industries and employers.

Each of these steps ensures that education is a strong tool to rehabilitate this vulnerable section (prisoners) in society with respected positions by equipping them with life skills, self-confidence, and everything they deserve to be better citizens.

Conclusion

Model Prison Manual 2016 and The Prisons Act 2023, both the documents are ambitious in nature for reforming Indian prisons. There are several gaps in their successful implementation and full realization. These policy documents serve as foundational elements in shifting punishment philosophies towards a more reformative and restorative approach. However, the success and responsiveness of these policies can be greatly enhanced through the collaborative and progressive efforts of states and union territories in India, evolving societal norms, and implementing reformative methodologies. Their focus on educational and correctional training programmes in prisons, reflects the commitments to humanize the penal system to reintegrate the former prisoners in society and thereby make them law abiding citizens.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 119-127
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00009.9
ISSN 0019-5006

Role of Vipassana on Mental Health of Individuals: A Review Paper

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Abstract

Vipassana, a significant kind of meditation, is a therapeutic practice that focuses on the profound interconnectedness between the mind and body, ultimately leading to the attainment of inner and outward tranquillity and mental equilibrium. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), approximately one-eighth of the global population is currently affected by mental health problems, which have significant implications for their physical health, overall well-being, social interactions, and occupational prospects. The maintenance of optimal mental health is crucial for the promotion and preservation of our comprehensive physical and psychological wellbeing. Consequently, researchers have increasingly focused their attention on a particular technique in recent years, recognizing its potential to alleviate stress and enhance overall well-being.

This study aims to access the available research on the role of Vipassana on the mental health of individuals. A comprehensive scoping review was conducted from 2018 to 2023. The review suggested that Vipassana has the potential to be useful in addressing various mental health and well-being concerns among individuals. The use of Vipassana in the case of collapse and burnout was not supported by sufficient data. The practice of Vipassana has been indicated as a protective factor against mental health issues. Based on the findings, it was concluded that researchers have the potential to significantly contribute to the enhancement of mental health and well-being among people. Through the implementation of research endeavours focused on various facets of the Vipassana method and its impact on stress

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management, job productivity, general well-being, and quality of life, it is possible to ascertain the significant role, it may play in raising awareness about the therapeutic advantages of the Vipassana method for individuals.

Keywords: *Mental health, well-being, Vipassana, Buddhist meditation or Buddhist mindfulness.*

Introduction

Vipassana is a profoundly ancient meditation technique originating from India. This method is a pragmatic approach that purifies the mind, ultimately resulting in the complete elimination of all forms of pain. "Vipassana" is a North Indian Pali word that translates to "observing things as they truly are". Although the terms "Mindfulness meditation" and "Vipassana meditation" are frequently used interchangeably, Vipassana is more precise. It entails impartially discerning one's own emotions and beliefs, devoid of any judgment or attachment. The Buddha propagated the practice of Vipassana as a comprehensive solution for addressing many forms of affliction. It is a self-transformation practice that facilitates profound awareness of the interconnectedness between the mind and body through the practice of self-observation (Jarukasemthawee, 2015). The interaction between emotions and the body is now a very important subject of study in psychology due to its significant potential utility for many therapeutic applications. The fundamental processes underlying the relationship between Vipassana and its therapeutic applications and mental health add to its widespread appeal (Zeng et al., 2014).

According to P.D. Thakur (1994), Vipassana classes for kids in India were a smashing success, with over 5,000 kids signing up for three-day classes . Parent and educators alike saw dramatic improvements in their students' ability to concentrate and retain information. Similar courses are also in the works in Western countries.

An eminent advantage of Vipassana meditation lies in its capacity to diminish stress and foster calm. Practitioners can redirect their attention from stress-inducing ideas and situations by concentrating on breathing and bodily sensations. This procedure facilitates the initiation of the body's relaxation response, resulting in a reduction in the synthesis of stress hormones like cortisol and an elevation in the secretion of pleasurable neurotransmitters such as endorphins (Hart, 2009).

In specific research examining the Impact of Vipassana Meditation on Plasma Endogenous Beta-Endorphin Levels and Quality of Life, it was shown that a majority

of those practicing meditation saw a notable elevation in beta-endorphin levels (Yan Naing Soe et al., 2023).

In significant research on the practice of Vipassana, it was shown that engaging in Vipassana meditation contributes to the effective management of anger and the enhancement of mental well-being (Rajesh Shirsath, 2019). According to the World Health Organisation (2022), approximately one-eighth of the global population is currently affected by mental health problems, which have significant implications for their physical health, overall well-being, social interactions, and occupational prospects. Mental health encompasses more than the mere absence of mental diseases. The phenomenon under consideration is situated on a multifaceted spectrum, whereby individuals perceive it in diverse ways, exhibiting differing levels of challenge and suffering, and possibly yielding disparate social and therapeutic consequences. Multiple individual, social, and structural determinants may interact over the course of an individual's lifetime to either support or hinder their mental health, thereby influencing their position along the mental health continuum. Multiple studies have demonstrated the efficacy of Vipassana meditation in alleviating symptoms associated with anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions, as well as reducing negative thoughts and emotional distress.

In a recent qualitative study on the Experiences of Attending a Vipassana Meditation Retreat, the researchers discovered that participants reported an enhanced awareness of their emotions and thoughts after the retreat. This heightened awareness enabled them to successfully cope with the many challenges encountered in their daily lives (Kirti Singhal and Sujata Sriram, 2023). In the study of ten days of Vipassana meditation it was found that by engaging in a ten-day Vipassana meditation training, individuals may develop a heightened ability to see and understand the various levels of mind and body awareness with enhanced clarity (Silva, E. M. M. and Nogueira, M. I., 2022). A research investigation carried out by the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi (2021) revealed that those in jail exhibited a decrease in neurotic tendencies, aggression, and sentiments of powerlessness after practicing Vipassana meditation. In addition, jailed individuals conveyed an increased perception of optimism and overall state of being after their participation in the Vipassana meditation programs (Kishore et al., 1995). There is evidence that vipassana practice, in conjunction with its ethical principles and rules, can foster a sense of calm, objectivity, and empathy, which in turn can strengthen social cohesiveness (Santosh Lama and Bhagwan Aryal, 2022).

According to Mr. S.N. Goenka (1994), vipassana practices help individuals make changes that promote society. In the summer of 2000, Mr. Goenka, the primary

instructor of vipassana meditation, attended the "Millennium World Peace Summit" in New York. During the event, he delivered a speech among several global spiritual luminaries. In his address, Mr. Goenka emphasized that global peace can only be attained when individuals find inner peace, and Vipassana meditation is the path that leads to this objective.

The present comprehensive scoping review of literature aimed to investigate the effect of Vipassana in improving mental health among the general population.

Method

This study aimed to access the available research on the role of Vipassana on the mental health of individuals. For this review of literature studies had to meet the following criteria:

i. Delivered the intervention entirely using offline methods
ii. Used validated instruments to assess mental health outcomes
iii. It selected only those studies which were published in the English language only
iv. Studies were excluded if the full text was irretrievable;
v. The intervention also involved other forms of psychotherapy unrelated to Vipassana practice.

For the scoping review, the papers were reviewed and screened for the applicability of Vipassana for mental health. The hunting strategy recaptured papers published in English from October 2018 to 2023 and were recaptured across Web of Science, Scopus, Science Direct, and Google Scholar. Keywords that were used included Vipassana, mental health, well-being, Buddhist meditation or Buddhist mindfulness, and review. The selection criteria initially included all original articles in English that were related to Vipassana meditation for mental health and then the abstracts of the potentially relevant articles were screened. Ultimately, the whole texts of the chosen articles were acquired and evaluated to determine their eligibility.

Results and Discussion

This review of literature aimed to investigate the effect of Vipassana in improving mental health among the general population. After doing a comprehensive study of the research articles, it has been determined that Vipassana is a highly successful meditation practice in the short term, with the ability to positively impact several aspects of mental health. Various research conducted during the COVID-19

pandemic have revealed that practicing Vipassana mindfulness meditation enhances emotional intelligence, character strengths, and overall well-being of individuals throughout periods of confinement (Manjari et al., 2022; Nikhil Mahindra, 2023).

Adults who engaged in Vipassana meditation demonstrated higher levels of self-esteem compared to those who did not practice Vipassana, who exhibited typical levels of self-esteem. The study found a strong and statistically significant positive association between self-efficacy and self-esteem, indicating that an increase in self-efficacy leads to an increase in self-esteem. (Inchara Chamaiah Swamy et al., 2023)

A comprehensive analysis of research papers across several domains of mental health demonstrates that Vipassana meditation offers a wide range of physiological and psychological advantages, significantly enhancing overall human welfare. The benefits encompass reduced stress levels, enhanced immune system functionality, lowered blood pressure and heart rate, improved sleep quality, and alleviated chronic pain. Hence, the use of Vipassana meditation possesses the capacity to induce significant and profound alterations in the human experience. (Shweta, 2019; Anjalee Thanuja Amarasekera and Dennis Chang 2019; Alok Kumar Verma, 2023).

The present study has determined that Vipassana meditation significantly reduces psychosocial issues in adults with Alcohol Dependence Syndrome. This is achieved by fostering insight, which in turn enhances positive behaviour and improves mental well-being. (Shweta 2019, Thenmozhi et al., 2022). In the case of collapse and burnout, it was set up that there is not sufficient data to support to use of Vipassana for this additionally, no significant assessment has been found about the simultaneous investigation of social well-being and spiritual health.

Through the practice of Vipassana, people experience a gradual transformation in their cognitive processes, whereby they are motivated to cultivate not just verbal quiet but also mental and emotional stillness. Over time, individuals may undergo a process of developing a non-judgmental and stable disposition that positively affects almost every sphere of life (Ayushi Bhargava et al., 2019).

This state of being fosters a sense of clarity and purpose, ultimately contributing to positive mental health and overall well-being. The significance of maintaining a consistent practice is crucial, particularly in the context of engaging in Vipassana meditation. The level of determination with which an individual commits to their Vipassana practice directly correlates with the quality of outcomes they are likely to

achieve. The practice of Vipassana, along with its ethical guidelines and principles, has been observed to promote a sense of tranquillity, impartiality, and empathy, hence supporting societal cohesion (Santosh Lama and Bhagwan Aryal, 2022). An unhealthy mental condition has been shown to have several negative effects on life over time. Vipassana has been shown to decrease mental problems but access to interventions is limited. Therefore, the effectiveness of Vipassana practices for mental health and well-being was investigated.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that the Vipassana system is a method that facilitates the elimination of one's sufferings by addressing the underlying causes of fear, want, and ignorance that contribute to our miseries. It enables individuals to experience a state of peacefulness and serenity. Vipassana meditation is believed to contribute to improved overall well-being and a positive, joyful state of mind. Individuals who possess a calm and rational attitude have less mental strain and confusion, enabling them to effectively address their challenges and ultimately lead to a contented and blissful existence. The study underscored the significance of Vipassana meditation in contemporary society as a means to enhance mental well-being.

The findings of the review of research contribute to a better understanding of the effectiveness of Vipassana in our lives, while the current state of study on the efficiency of Vipassana practices is still in its early stages, it is imperative to conduct more studies to demonstrate the efficacy of Vipassana in our daily lives.

However, the extensive accessibility and affordability of Vipassana practice have the potential to enhance mental health and overall well-being in a significant number of individuals. Vipassana practices have the potential to be used for a multitude of objectives. For instance, when addressing concerns faced by housewives pertaining to feelings of inadequacy and inefficiency, as well as adult difficulties around uncertainty and accomplishment, and finally, challenges associated with old age such as loneliness and emptiness.

Future Directions

Future explorations and researches could look into evaluating the effects of Vipassana on different patients' characteristics and other health outcomes for which Vipassana practices have been shown to help. There is a suggestion to integrate Vipassana with other psychotherapies to boost their effectiveness in addressing

different mental health problems. Furthermore, there is a dearth of substantial research on the concurrent examination of Vipassana meditation concerning both social well-being and spiritual health. This has the potential to be used as a future endorsement.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 128-141
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00010.5
ISSN 0019-5006

Issues and Challenges Faced by Transgender LGBTQ+ Community in India: An Analytical Study

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Abstract

Heterosexuality should no longer be assumed as the default; this assumption is known as heterosexism. While many societies have made considerable progress in advocating for human rights, LGBT rights continue to face challenges in gaining widespread acceptance. Notably, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted in 1948, does not specifically address sexual orientation, making the recognition of LGBT rights a matter of debate. However, the Declaration does assert that everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms outlined, without any form of distinction. One of the significant challenges faced by transgender individuals is a lack of social acceptance. Despite being part of every culture throughout recorded history, they have only recently gained attention in psychological, medical, and social research. Unchecked negative attitudes towards transgender people can lead to transphobia and discriminatory treatment. As transgender visibility increases, it is essential to support their integration into mainstream society. To achieve this, understanding the psychological issues and challenges they face, as well as examining societal attitudes, is crucial. This study aims to provide a deeper understanding of social identity development and contemporary issues within the LGBTQ community, emphasizing its significance in shaping modern perspectives on one of the most marginalized groups. The research encourages youth to engage with the challenges faced by the LGBTQ community, with a primary focus on the issues and challenges encountered by the community in India, along with the rights and welfare schemes available to them in the country.

Keywords: *LGBTQ+ community, India, LGBTQ rights, social status, welfare schemes.*

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Introduction

LGBT is an acronym representing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. According to Gender Wiki, the acronym LGBT is used to highlight a diversity of sexualities and gender identities and sometimes encompasses all non-heterosexual or non-cisgender individuals, rather than being exclusive to those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.[2] A popular variant, LGBTQ, includes the letter Q for those who identify as queer and/or are questioning their sexual identity, with this term being in use since 1996.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals are more likely to face intolerance, discrimination, harassment, and violence due to their sexual orientation compared to heterosexual individuals. This is largely attributed to homophobia, which is the fear or hatred of homosexuality. Several factors, including moral, religious, and political beliefs of dominant groups, contribute to the reinforcement of homophobia on a larger scale. In some countries, homosexuality is criminalized and can result in fines, imprisonment, life sentences, or even the death penalty. Human sexuality is experienced in a variety of ways, with some individuals identifying as transgender, transsexual, or intersex, further challenging traditional gender categories. As more individuals openly express their sexual orientations, they are also organizing and advocating for their rights. Thanks to the efforts of these groups and their allies, acceptance of LGBT rights is growing worldwide. In response, some governments are beginning to pass laws supporting LGBT rights and enacting anti-discrimination laws.[3] Looking ahead, the primary global challenges for LGBT rights will include eradicating persecution based on sexual orientation, ensuring legal protection against hate crimes and propaganda, advocating for equal rights and privileges (such as marriage, adoption, medical decision-making, and inheritance), and combating homophobia and heterosexism through education and awareness efforts.

Research Objectives

- To study the problem faced by Transgender (LGBTQ+) community in India;
- To study the available LGBTQ rights, policies and welfare schemes in India; and
- To provide suggestions to improve their social status in India.

[2]https://gender.fandom.com › wiki › Gender_Wiki
[3]UN Free & Equal: https://www.unfe.org ›

Review of Literature

Anuradha Parasar (2007) in "Homosexuality in India – The Invisible Conflict" discusses homosexual marriages in India as a concealed issue, examining their evolution, societal attitudes, and the outcomes of legalizing homosexual relationships in other countries.[4] She concludes, based on empirical and theoretical evidence, on the possibility of legalizing such marriages in India. Chatterjee Subhrajit (2014) in "Problems Faced by LGBT People in the Mainstream Society: Some Recommendations" states that LGBTQ individuals face similar prejudices due to societal beliefs about sexuality and gender, leading to socioeconomic injustice, discrimination, and violence, more so than heterosexual individuals.[5] Rachel Kathleen O'Prey (2012) in "A Study on Attitudes Toward LGBTQ Youth" explores how religious commitment, training, and race affect homophobic and transphobic attitudes, highlighting the need for more effective training to improve social worker perceptions and advocacy for LGBTQ youth in care.[6]

Naz Foundation vs Government Of Nct Of Delhi And Others ... Indian Kanoon https://indiankanoon.org › docAmber Tanweer (2018) in "LGBT Rights in India" discusses the concept and nature of LGBT individuals, highlighting discrimination based on sex that violates their fundamental and human rights. The paper focuses on legal definitions, existing gaps, challenges faced by the LGBT minority in India, and the removal of social stigmas to ensure equal rights for all.[7] Dr. B. Golden Kisha (2015) in "A Study of Attitude of Society Towards Transgender in South India" compares the attitudes of youth and adults towards transgender individuals. The study reveals that adult women (not college students) exhibit more positive attitudes, with religion not playing a significant role in shaping these views.[8]

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[4]ResearchGate
https://www.researchgate.net › publication › 36179297... (PDF) Homosexuality In India - The Invisible Conflict:
[5]Search Labs | AI Overview
[6]Search Labs | AI Overview; also
Naz Foundation vs Government Of Nct Of Delhi And Others ... Indian Kanoon https://indiankanoon.org›doc
[7]Centre for Law & Policy Research https://clpr.org.in › uploads › 2019/06 › Section-...
[8]LGBT Rights in India: The Status Quo,International Journal of Law Management & Humanities https://www.ijlmh.com › wp-content › uploads

Research Methodology

The current research is exploratory in nature and the focus is to study the issues and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ community in India, the rights and welfare schemes in India to help the LGBTQ+ Community. The study is carried out completely based on secondary data as there is almost no opportunity to gather primary data. The study is also conducted in geographical limitations, considering only India because of limitation of financial support, legal and social issues.

Major Challenges Faced by LGBT Community

History of Legal Battles of LGBT Community and Campaign Against Sec 377

After decades of legal challenges to Section 377, the Naz Foundation filed a petition in 2001 with the Delhi High Court, questioning the law's constitutional validity. The petition was rejected by the Delhi High Court in 2004 based on local standings. In 2006, they appealed the decision to the Supreme Court of India, which ruled in their favor and upheld their petition. In 2009, a landmark verdict in the case of Naz Foundation v. Govt. of NCT of New Delhi and Others led the Delhi High Court to read down Section 377, declaring it unconstitutional. This ruling marked a significant moment in Indian history, offering a glimmer of hope for the LGBT community during a dark time. However, this victory was short-lived, as the Supreme Court overturned the Delhi High Court's judgment in 2013.[9]

In 2013, the Supreme Court overruled the Delhi High Court judgment in Souresh Koushal vs. Union of India. The Supreme Court held that Section 377 could not be read down and it was for Parliament to decide on decriminalization of homosexuality. Despite the Supreme Court judgment, the movement against the Sec 377 expanded on a large scale. In April 2014 a bench of two judges of the Supreme Court of India passed a verdict in National Legal Services Authority v. Union of India ("NALSA") and held that the rights to life, dignity and autonomy would include the right to one's gender identity and sexual orientation and they have a right to express their chosen gender identity. The NALSA verdict gave a new hope to rekindle the battle against sec 377.[10] Subsequently, in 2017, a landmark verdict was given by the Supreme

[9]Search Labs | AI Overview

[10]Search Labs | AI Overview;
Problems Faced by LGBT People in the Mainstream Society;
International Journal of Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies (IJIMS) https://www.ijims.com›uploads

Court in the case of Puttaswamy V. Union of India, the Supreme Court held that the right to privacy cannot be refused "even if a minute fraction of the population is affected". The Court declared that the right to privacy distinctively incorporates the right to have intimate relations of one's choice and includes the right to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Impact of Exclusion and Discrimination

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals face significant challenges growing up in a society where heterosexuality is often considered the only acceptable orientation, and homosexuality is viewed as deviant. They continue to experience discrimination and exclusion worldwide in various aspects of life. Homophobic violence and abuse against LGBT people are prevalent. Same-sex couples lack the same rights and protections as opposite-sex couples, leading to discrimination in areas like healthcare, pensions, and social protection schemes. In the workplace, many LGBT individuals conceal their sexual orientation or endure harassment for fear of losing their jobs.

Young LGBT individuals are particularly vulnerable, facing alienation from family and friends, harassment at school, and invisibility, which can result in academic underachievement, school dropout, mental health issues, and homelessness. This discrimination not only limits their access to essential social services like employment, healthcare, education, and housing but also marginalizes them within society, making them one of the most vulnerable groups.

Here are some major problems faced by LGBT in India.[11]

Marginalization and Social Exclusion

Marginalized individuals often have little control over their lives or available resources, and they may become stigmatized due to negative public attitudes. Their opportunities for social contribution can be limited, leading to low self-confidence, poor self-esteem, and isolation. LGBT individuals often experience multiple forms of marginalization, such as racism, sexism, poverty, and homophobia or transphobia, all of which can negatively affect mental health. Marginalization and bias related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression frequently prevent LGBT people

[11]Search Labs | AI Overview; ous health and mental health problems.; Helping Families Support Their Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and ...

from accessing essential public services like healthcare and housing, contributing to significant health disparities. The exclusion and discrimination faced by LGBT individuals have profound effects on their lives, leading to outcomes such as early school dropout, leaving home and family, difficulty finding regular jobs, and fewer opportunities compared to others.[12]

Impact of Family Reactions on LGBT Children

Many lesbians, gay men, and bisexual individuals (LGB) delayed discussing their identity until adulthood, fearing rejection and negative reactions. Prior to the 1990s, LGBT youth had limited resources to explore their identity or find support. However, the rise of the internet, school diversity clubs, and LGBT youth groups has provided gay and transgender youth with access to accurate information, guidance, and support. With these resources, more LGBT youth are coming out during adolescence. Until recently, there was little understanding of how families react when an LGBT young person comes out during adolescence.

Families and caregivers play a crucial role in the well-being and risk factors of their LGBT children. Poor communication and misunderstandings between parents and LGBT children often lead to increased family conflict. This lack of understanding regarding sexual orientation and gender identity can escalate into fighting and family disruption, sometimes resulting in LGBT adolescents being removed from or forced out of their homes. As a consequence, many LGBT youth are placed in foster care, end up in juvenile detention, or find themselves on the streets due to family conflict linked to their LGBT identity.

Problems of Homophobia

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are more likely to experience intolerance, discrimination, harassment, and the threat of violence due to their sexual orientation, than those who identify themselves as heterosexual. This is due to homophobia. Some of the factors that may reinforce homophobia on a larger scale are moral, religious, and political beliefs of a dominant group. Living in a homophobic environment, forces many LGBT people to conceal their sexuality, for fear of the negative reactions and consequences of coming out. Homophobia manifests itself in

[12]Generative AI is experimental;
Harassment disparities and risk profile within lesbian, gay ... National Institutes of Health (NIH) (.gov) https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov › articles › PMC9797955

different forms, for example homophobic jokes, physical attacks, discrimination in the workplace and negative media representation. LGBT people who make the decision to declare their sexual orientation can face prejudice and discrimination from their family, friends, and also from wider society.

Harassment of LGBT Students in Schools

LGBT students face harassment in schools. Being a teenager is tough enough without fearing harassment in a place where you are supposed to feel safe. All over the country lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students get harassed every day at school. Students who may be even just perceived as being LGBT also get harassed.[13]

Drug Addiction of LGBT people

LGBT people are more likely to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs than the general population, are less likely to abstain, report higher rates of substance abuse problems, and are more likely to continue heavy drinking into later life. LGBT individuals use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs for similar reasons as others, but their likelihood of doing so is increased by personal and cultural stresses linked to their sexual orientation or gender identity. These stresses are often compounded by the challenges of deciding which aspects of their identity to disclose, and to whom, such as at work, with friends, family, neighbours, in medical settings, or in social activities.

Problems of Criminalization

In some countries, homosexuality is illegal and punishable by fines, imprisonment, life sentences, and even the death penalty. In India, the advancement of gay rights took a significant setback when, in December 2011, the Supreme Court overturned a 2009 ruling by a lower court that had decriminalized gay sex, thus reclassifying homosexuality as an offense. Section 377 of India's Penal Code, a law dating back to the 19th century, prohibits sex "against the order of nature."[14]

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[13]Wikipedia
https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › Section_377
[14]Views and Experiences of LGBTQ+ People in Prison ... National Institutes of Health (NIH) (.gov)
https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov › articles › PMC8430972

Legal Injustice

LGBT communities face significant issues related to legal injustice. Certain groups within the LGBT community are disproportionately affected by violence and discrimination, often at the hands of law enforcement. In recent years, there have been numerous documented cases of police brutality targeting LGBT individuals. People of color, transgender individuals, and LGBT homeless youth are particularly vulnerable, facing higher rates of non-violent drug arrests compared to their white, heterosexual counterparts. They are also more likely to face drug possession charges and receive harsher sentences. Once incarcerated, LGBT individuals often endure further harassment in an already brutal prison system. Additionally, many LGBT individuals lack legal protections against abusive and discriminatory actions, as oppressive laws and ordinances deny them the same basic rights and privileges as non-LGBT individuals.[15]

Problems of Terminology

Problems in language occur when terminology is unclear or when terminology has been associated with negative stereotypes. Problems occur in language concerning lesbians, gay men, and bisexual persons when the language is too vague or the concepts are poorly defined. Language may be ambiguous in reference, so that the reader is uncertain about its meaning or its inclusion and exclusion criteria; and the term homosexuality has been associated in the past with deviance, mental illness, and criminal behaviour, and these negative stereotypes may be perpetuated by biased language. In India this community is being called ‘chakka’ as if their lives have no value from a very young age, perhaps due to their upbringing, they are made to differentiate between male and female genders.

Discrimination at Workplace

Discrimination against LGBT individuals in the workplace significantly contributes to the socioeconomic disparities they face. Gay and transgender people often experience socioeconomic inequalities due to workplace discrimination, which directly impacts their job stability, leading to higher rates of unemployment and poverty.

[15]Why do some people calls transgenders 'sixer' or 'chhakka ...Quora,https://www.quora.com › Why-do-some-people-calls-tr...

Government Efforts for Transgender Persons

The *Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2019* defines a transgender person as one whose gender identity does not align with the gender assigned at birth. It includes transgender men and women, individuals with intersex variations, gender-queers, and those with socio-cultural identities, such as kinnar and hijra. The Bill allows transgender individuals to apply to the District Magistrate for a certificate of identity that recognizes their gender as "transgender."

The Bill also proposes the creation of a National Council for Transgender Persons (NCT) and prohibits discrimination against transgender individuals in areas such as education, employment, healthcare, movement, residence, rental housing, access to public or private offices, and government or private establishments. The Act further ensures the right of transgender persons to reside with their parents and immediate family members. Offenses committed against transgender persons are punishable by imprisonment of 6 months to 2 years, along with a fine.[16]

'Transgender Community Desk' at Gachibowli Police Station

This is the first-of-its-kind gender-inclusive community policing initiative in the country, the Cyberabad police inaugurated a 'Transgender Community Desk' at Gachibowli Police Station. The desk will be managed by a police liaison officer and a transgender person who is designated as a community coordinator. It will be the focal point for all grievance redressed among the transgender community in the Cyberabad Commissionerate. The desk will provide support to file cases in offences related to violence or discrimination against any transgender person. Among other services, the desk will also provide counselling, legal aid, life skills, soft skills training, job placements, and referral linkages to welfare schemes in partnership with the Department of Women and Child Welfare, and the District Legal Services Authority. The Society for Cyberabad Security Council (SCSC) will also organise monthly training, employability, life-skill training, and facilitate access to job opportunities, while Prajwala, a non-governmental organisation, would assist the desk to facilitate a safe space for any transgender person who needs emergency transit stay.[17]

[16]transgender persons (protection of rights) act, 2019 (india)
South Asian Translaw Database https://translaw.clpr.org.in › Legislations
[17]India's first 'Transgender Community Desk' opens ... - The Hindu The Hindu
https://www.thehindu.com › News › Cit

Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020

The Central Government made the rules under the powers conferred by the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019.[18] The Act came into effect on 10th January 2020, which is the first concrete step towards ensuring the welfare of transgender persons. The rules seek to recognise the identity of transgender and prohibit discrimination in the fields of education, employment, healthcare, holding or disposing of property, holding public or private office and access to and use of public services and benefits. It prohibits the discrimination of transgender persons at educational establishments, in employment or occupational opportunities, healthcare services.

National Council for Transgender Persons

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment constituted the National Council for Transgender Persons in August 2020. This council was established to advise the government on policies, programmes, legislation, and projects concerning transgender persons.

National Portal for Transgender Persons

Launched by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment in November 2020, the National Portal for Transgender Persons enables applicants to obtain a Certificate of Identity and Identity Card without physical interaction with the issuing office. Individuals who receive the certificate are entitled to change their first name on their birth certificate and all other official documents related to their identity.

Allowance for Transgender Persons

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, as the nodal ministry for transgender welfare, decided to provide a subsistence allowance of Rs. 1500 to each transgender person to support their basic needs. This financial assistance aims to help the transgender community meet their day-to-day requirements. NGOs and Community-based Organizations (CBOs) working for transgender persons have been tasked with raising awareness about this initiative.

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[18]Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Rules, 2020 High Court of Tripura
https://thc.nic.in › Central Governmental Rules

SMILE - Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise

The SMILE scheme focuses on the rehabilitation and welfare of transgender persons, including provisions for medical care, counselling, education, skill development, and economic support. The Comprehensive Rehabilitation for the Welfare of Transgender Persons is a sub-scheme under the SMILE initiative, which emphasizes rehabilitation, medical facilities, intervention, counselling, education, skill development, and economic linkages for transgender individuals.[19]

PM-DAKSH

PM-DAKSH is a skill development scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice. PM-DAKSH provides skill development training to transgender beneficiaries. It provides short term training programme, up-skilling/re-skilling, entrepreneurship development programme, and long-term training programmes for transgender persons under the PM-DAKSH scheme.[20]

Garima Greh: Shelter Home for Transgender Persons

Garima Greh- Shelter Home for Transgender Persons is a pilot scheme of the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment to provide shelter to transgender persons. The main aim of *Garima Greh* shelter homes is to provide safe and secure shelter to transgender persons in need. These Garima Greh shelter homes are in the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Delhi, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Tamil Nadu and Odisha. Ministry has provided full financial assistance to community based organizations (CBOs) for setting up these *Garima Greh* shelter homes. *Garima Greh* shelter homes provide basic amenities like food, shelter, medical care, recreational facilities to transgender persons. Garima Greh shelter homes also conduct capacity building and skill development programmes for transgender persons.[21]

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[19]National Council for Transgender Persons
Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org › wiki › National_Council_for_...
[20]National Portal For Transgender Persons : Ministry of Social … National Portal For Transgender Persons https://transgender.dosje.gov.in
[21]Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment https://socialjustice.gov.in › UploadFile
Support for Marginalized Individuals for Livelihood and Enterprise

Recommendations

To address the numerous challenges faced by the LGBTQ community, India needs to implement several changes to reduce discrimination:

1. **Inclusion of LGBTQ in School Curriculum:** The stigma surrounding LGBTQ individuals largely stems from a lack of awareness and understanding. India should introduce LGBTQ education in schools to increase awareness and exposure among students, fostering acceptance and reducing ignorance.

2. **Develop a Pro-LGBTQ Environment:** One of the major challenges for the LGBTQ community is inclusion and isolation. Although progress has been made with open conversations, more platforms for the LGBTQ community to meet, share experiences, and support each other are needed. Providing a safe space for expression can help alleviate mental health issues, such as suicidal thoughts, and promote overall well-being.

3. **Government Intervention and Programmes:** The government should focus on creating programmes for the LGBTQ community, particularly transgender individuals, to help them secure employment and break free from cycles of poverty and discrimination. Special attention should be given to rural areas, including workshops and awareness campaigns to combat honour killings and corrective therapies imposed by families.

4. **Construction of Shelters:** Building shelters in rural areas for the LGBTQ community could provide a safe space to regroup and prevent homelessness.

5. **Free Counselling Sessions**: Addressing the psychological stress faced by many LGBTQ individuals is essential. The government should offer free counselling and therapy services to support mental health.

6. **Police Sensitization:** Police forces at all levels should be sensitized to LGBT issues and fundamental human rights principles to ensure fair and respectful treatment.

7. **Eliminate Stigmatizing Language:** Language that stigmatizes LGBTQ individuals, such as terms like "sexual deviate" or "sexual invert," should be avoided to foster a more inclusive society.

8. **Education on Acceptance:** Local authorities, policymakers, schools, and families need to be better educated on accepting gender-diverse children and treating individuals of varying sexual orientations and gender identities with equality, while applying policies and programmes in a friendly, non-hostile manner.

Conclusion

LGBT individuals, who often have different sexual orientations, face widespread discrimination and exclusion, making it difficult to meet their basic needs. This exclusion can manifest in various ways, from personal relationships to societal ignorance and violations of fundamental rights. Historically, LGBT people have been involved in the fight for racial and economic justice, and today, many LGBTQ activists draw connections between LGBT rights and broader social justice movements. Ultimately, protecting LGBT individuals from violence and discrimination does not require creating new specific rights or human rights standards. All individuals, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, are entitled to the protections guaranteed by international human rights law, including the rights to life, security, privacy, freedom from torture, arbitrary detention, discrimination, and the right to freedom of expression, association, and peaceful assembly.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 142-151
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00011.7
ISSN 0019-5006

Global Perspectives on Social Challenges and Mental Health Issues Faced by Transgender Individuals

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Abstract

Transgender individuals represent one of the most marginalized segments of society. Their journey begins with challenges from birth, especially for those born intersex, who face discrimination and familial rejection due to ambiguous genitalia. Even for those not born intersex, transgender individuals encounter difficulties as they enter adolescence, where their transgender identity becomes more apparent, leading to social and mental health struggles. While their childhood may seem relatively benign, marked by their transgender identity being dismissed as mere childish behaviour, the onset of puberty intensifies their challenges as their behaviour appears peculiar to their families. During this period, their transgender identity becomes conspicuous, inviting ostracization from family, bullying in educational institutions, and a lack of support from teachers and staff. When it comes to earning a living, transgender individuals face sheer discrimination in employment, sexual harassment in the workplace, and prejudice that makes it difficult to survive in such an environment. These challenges not only manifest socially but also take a toll on their mental well-being, with gender dysphoria being a prominent, albeit often inconspicuous, issue leading to stress, anxiety, and depression. Discrimination from society exacerbates these mental health problems, making transgender individuals more susceptible to depression, with the highest rates of suicide among this community compared to other marginalized groups facing similar issues.

Keywords: *Transgender, gender dysphoria, mental health, social discrimination, cisgender.*

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Introduction

Transgender individuals, those whose gender identity does not align with the sex assigned at birth, have historically faced significant challenges and discrimination, often being misunderstood as mentally ill. The diagnostic criteria for transgender individuals have evolved, transitioning from categories like *Transsexualism* in ICD-10 (1990) to *Gender Identity Disorder* and later *Gender Incongruence* in ICD-11 (2022), reflecting a shift away from pathologizing transgender identities. The new diagnostic criteria took thirty-two years to accurately perceive the concept of gender identity and introduced significant changes to the previous criteria. These changes involved removing the condition from the category of "Disorder" and replacing it with "Incongruence." Earlier in the DSM-IV, transgender individuals were classified under *Gender Identity Disorder*, a term that was later replaced with *Gender Dysphoria* in the DSM-5 (2013), and then refined again in the DSM-5-TR (2023).

Despite these changes, transgender people continue to be one of the most marginalized communities globally, facing adversity in various aspects of life and societal settings. They encounter widespread rejection and discrimination, reflecting a long-standing struggle for acceptance. While transgender individuals have existed throughout history and were once accepted in Indian society, societal attitudes have shifted, leading to their marginalization and even criminalization, relegating them to the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy. Their challenges encompass social, economic, mental, and physical aspects, particularly during the transition process itself, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their struggles.

Challenges Faced by Transgender People

The initial hurdle faced by transgender individuals is predominantly social, encompassing their interactions within family, community, school, workplace, and public spaces. The family dynamic poses the first and often most formidable challenge. Frequently, families struggle to acknowledge and accept the gender identity of their transgender relatives, presenting a profound setback. As the primary support system for individuals, familial rejection leaves transgender individuals with a deep sense of isolation. Studies by Khullar and Riggs (2018) highlight that transgender individuals receive the lowest level of familial support compared to the general population. Research by Chatterjee (2018) further underscores the ramifications of familial non-acceptance, revealing that transgender children may feel compelled to leave their homes due to their families' refusal to recognize their gender identity. Alternatively, if they choose to remain with their parents, societal pressures often dictate that they

conform to traditional gender norms, including marrying a partner of the opposite sex who shares their gender identity.

Moreover, investigations conducted by Mohammadi et al. (2023) in Iran shed light on the extreme measures taken by families to conceal the transgender identities of their children, driven by the fear of religious persecution and penalties, including death by stoning as dictated by Sharia law. Consequently, the fear of reprisal and the religious implications prompt both families and transgender individuals to conceal their true identities.

The majority of transgender individuals face significant educational challenges, often stemming from an education system that fails to accommodate their needs. This lack of inclusivity not only affects transgender children within their families but also extends to their experiences within schools, which serve as a secondary source of trauma characterized by discrimination and prejudice. Traditional Indian educational institutions typically adhere to binary gender norms, overlooking the existence and needs of transgender individuals, leading to widespread bullying and a pervasive atmosphere of fear and misunderstanding. Research conducted by Barman (2024) reveals that the literacy rate among transgender individuals stands at 56.1%, significantly lower than the national average of 74.04%, despite recent improvements to approximately 85%. The primary barriers to accessing education for transgender individuals include rejection, bullying, and the conspicuous effects of gender dysphoria, which often lead to dropout rates. Furthermore, the school environment and culture may not be conducive to their well-being, contributing to their decision to leave. Rajkumar (2016) identifies a critical gap in the Indian education system, emphasizing the absence of sensitization programs for both staff and students, along with a lack of structural changes aimed at fostering inclusivity.

Notably, the New Education Policy (NEP) of 2020 in India marks a significant milestone by acknowledging transgender children as a socially and economically marginalized group for the first time in educational history. Under the NEP 2020, transgender students are categorized as part of the Socio-Economically Disadvantaged Groups (SDGs), with provisions such as the Gender Inclusion Fund (GIF) aimed at providing equitable education opportunities for transgender students alongside their peers. However, despite these advancements, dropout rates remain high among transgender individuals, underscoring the need for comprehensive support systems within educational settings beyond mere access to education. Addressing the multifaceted social issues facing transgender students requires a holistic approach that extends beyond the realm of education alone.

In India, transphobia is rampant in mainstream society, often refusing to accept individuals with transgender identities. Derogatory labels such as "Halwa," "Meetha," and "Chhakka" are commonly used, exacerbating feelings of alienation and hostility. Consequently, transgender individuals often struggle to form meaningful connections and friendships within mainstream society, as their gender identity does not align with societal expectations. Fear of rejection, humiliation, and bullying further compounds the reluctance to disclose one's true gender identity, hindering social integration and exacerbating feelings of isolation. Education and employment opportunities are severely limited due to systemic discrimination and prejudice. Transgender individuals lack confidence due to a lack of education, as most children drop out because of gender dysphoria and the stigma associated with their gender identity (More, 2021). Despite completing their education, transgender individuals often face discrimination in employment, regardless of meeting the necessary criteria. Furthermore, gender dysphoria and educational barriers impede professional growth, contributing to a lack of confidence among transgender individuals.

In Islamic countries, adherence to traditional gender norms dictated by Sharia law exacerbates the oppression and persecution faced by transgender individuals. Deviation from assigned gender roles is considered sinful, leading to severe social and legal consequences (Zaharin and Chiarolli, 2020). Even in Westernized nations like Canada and the USA, transgender individuals continue to encounter unequal treatment and opportunities. Despite the principles of equality, transgender individuals are often marginalized and excluded from mainstream society due to their failure to conform to binary gender norms. Ultimately, transgender individuals confront significant challenges to survival and social inclusion, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries because they do not fit within the male-female binary (Fish, 2020). Addressing these systemic inequalities requires concerted efforts to promote acceptance, equality, and inclusivity across all societies.

Employment Opportunities and Challenges at Workplace

Employment opportunities for transgender individuals are marred by pervasive discrimination and transphobia, presenting formidable challenges in securing stable employment. According to research conducted by the National Human Rights Commission, an alarming 90% of transgender individuals face outright denial of employment opportunities, regardless of their qualifications or merit. Cultural norms and societal practices further perpetuate this discrimination, with transgender individuals often subjected to ridicule and ostracization within their communities. As a result, a staggering 96% of transgender individuals are compelled to resort to low

paying jobs or even engage in professions such as begging or prostitution to sustain themselves. Even highly educated transgender individuals encounter significant barriers in securing employment, with a considerable portion—approximately 27%—resorting to prostitution due to a lack of viable job opportunities, thereby exposing themselves to numerous health risks (Chauhan, 2020). However, it is imperative to recognize the potential and capabilities of transgender individuals. With proper education and guidance, they possess the capacity to contribute meaningfully to society and economic progress, as evidenced by studies conducted by David & Yeung (2022).

Despite these merits, discrimination and stigma persist as significant obstacles, undermining their acceptance and integration into the workforce. Even if they are selected for a job, they are less likely to receive rewards for their performance or experience further career growth (Elk & Boehmer, 2015). American research reveals that transgender people face such challenges in the workplace because 40% of respondents are in favor of transgender rights, while 55% lack knowledge of gender, particularly about transgender individuals and their gender issues (Johnsons, 2011). While the challenges faced by transgender individuals may be more pronounced in countries like India compared to more progressive nations like the US, the pervasive nature of discrimination transcends geographical boundaries. Even in developed countries, transgender individuals encounter significant hurdles in accessing employment opportunities and experiencing career advancement. Research from the United States indicates that a substantial portion of the population lacks an understanding of transgender issues, further exacerbating workplace discrimination and hindering the recognition of their rights. In essence, the challenges faced by transgender individuals in securing employment are universal, underscoring the urgent need for concerted efforts to address discrimination and promote inclusivity in all societies, irrespective of their level of development.

Gender Dysphoria

Gender dysphoria is a condition characterized by significant discomfort experienced by transgender individuals due to a misalignment between their gender identity and the sex assigned to them at birth. Defined by the diagnostic criteria outlined in the DSM-V, gender dysphoria manifests as a persistent incongruence between one's experienced gender and biological sex, lasting for a minimum of six months. Individuals affected by gender dysphoria often experience a profound desire to live as and be recognized as the gender opposite to that assigned at birth. Studies have highlighted the detrimental effects of gender identity change efforts (GICE) on

transgender individuals, including heightened levels of alcohol consumption, psychological distress, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts, as evidenced by research conducted by Rootes, McGeorge, Salas, and Levine (2021). In the Netherlands, research by Kuyper and Wijsen (2013) identified three primary aspects of gender dysphoria: dissatisfaction with one's assigned sex at birth, a strong identification with a gender different from that assigned at birth, and a desire for hormone therapy and sex reassignment surgery (SRS). The majority of respondents expressed a desire to align their physical bodies with their experienced gender identity, highlighting the importance of access to medical interventions such as hormone therapy and SRS in alleviating gender dysphoria (Kuyper & Wijsen, 2013).

Mental Health Issues and Suicide among Transgender Persons

Transgender individuals are disproportionately affected by mental health challenges compared to the general population, reflecting their status as one of the most suppressed, oppressed, marginalized, and discriminated groups worldwide. While legal persecution may vary across different regions, transgender individuals face significant social discrimination and rejection in societies such as India, Nepal, and Myanmar, particularly in Islamic-majority countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan, where transgender identity is viewed as a religious sin. Transgender individuals suffer not only in Islamic or closed societies in the Indian Subcontinent but also face challenges in progressive and modern societies like the USA, Canada, and Germany.

Research indicates that transgender individuals encounter numerous obstacles to mental well-being, including higher rates of depression, stress, anxiety, and overall psychological distress. These negative mental health outcomes often lead to elevated suicide rates, the highest among any demographic globally. Substance abuse is also prevalent among transgender individuals, often serving as a coping mechanism to manage stress levels (Handrics & Testa, 2012). Moreover, transgender individuals experience physical health disparities, such as higher rates of somatization, including conditions like high blood pressure and cardiovascular diseases, compared to non-transgender populations in countries like the USA. These health disparities are exacerbated by factors such as anticipated negative self-evaluation and low self-esteem, which initiate stress (Mayor, 2003). Their exposure to abuse leads to conditions like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Warren et al., 2022).

Suicide rates are also reported to be high among transgender individuals. Reports suggest that suicidal ideation and suicide attempts are 61% and 31%, respectively,

compared to 20% and 7% among non-transgender persons (Eisenberg et al., 2017). Additionally, individuals suffering from depression are more likely to experience conditions such as arthritis, cardiac disease, cancer, and lung disease (Bisschop et al., 2016). Studies have shown that transgender people start experiencing stress as soon as they realize they will be judged during the interview, selection process, or in the workplace or school, especially when fellow students, teachers, and non-teaching staff are not sensitized to their gender, social, and mental issues.

Studies also highlight the profound impact of discrimination and lack of awareness about transgender issues in various societal contexts, including educational and workplace settings. Transgender individuals often face stress and judgment during interviews, selection processes, and workplace interactions, compounded by the lack of sensitivity and awareness among peers, educators, and staff. Overall, transgender individuals endure significant mental and physical health challenges stemming from societal discrimination, lack of acceptance, and systemic barriers to equality. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive efforts to promote awareness, sensitivity, and inclusivity across all sectors of society.

Discussion

Transgender individuals represent one of the most vulnerable and marginalized populations worldwide. They face social, economic, and health challenges in all societies, whether conservative/closed, moderate, or developed and progressive. Discrimination and non-acceptance often begin in childhood, within the family. Families are frequently unwilling to acknowledge and accept their children's gender identity due to a lack of awareness and societal pressure, as being transgender is often seen as a shameful status for the family. The next significant challenges come from schools and neighbourhoods, where transgender individuals face bullying, shame, discrimination, and violence.

This suffering intensifies in conservative Islamic countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iran, and Iraq, where transgender individuals are penalized and subjected to severe punishments for their gender identity, including flogging, stoning to death, or being thrown from heights.

In moderate countries like India, Nepal, and Japan, transgender individuals are not criminalized as in conservative Islamic nations, but social acceptance remains a distant goal. They still struggle to achieve equal status and human rights in these societies, facing prejudice and discrimination at every level. Transgender individuals

also face struggles in modern and progressive societies like the UK, USA, Canada, Germany, and France. In these developed societies, although legal protections may exist, transgender individuals often experience workplace discrimination, particularly regarding career rewards and growth. They are judged during performance appraisals and often denied the same opportunities as cisgender employees.

The mental health of transgender individuals is severely affected by the societal attitudes they face and the gender dysphoria they have endured, often since childhood. They feel constant stress when interacting with cisgender individuals, who typically harbor negative attitudes toward them. Anxiety and depression rates are higher among transgender individuals than among cisgender individuals. Studies worldwide have shown that suicide rates are also higher among transgender individuals. Transgender people often suffer from low self-esteem and lack of confidence, which contributes to depression. Their constant mental health struggles make them more susceptible to conditions such as cancer, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and arthritis. Employment opportunities and career growth are limited for transgender individuals when compared to cisgender people.

Conclusion

Transgender individuals face significant challenges in both social and economic spheres, making them one of the most marginalized and vulnerable populations globally. These challenges are exacerbated by the prevalence of mental health issues among transgender individuals, which surpass those experienced by cisgender individuals. Discrimination, lack of acceptance, prejudice, and violence are pervasive in their daily lives, further entrenching their marginalized status. Economically, transgender individuals are often relegated to low-paying jobs due to employment discrimination and may be forced into prostitution as a means of survival, exposing them to numerous health risks.

The combination of these economic struggles and the inherent challenges of gender dysphoria contribute to heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among transgender individuals, leading to somatization. The intersection of social, economic, and health challenges faced by transgender individuals underscores the urgent need for comprehensive efforts to address discrimination, promote acceptance, and improve access to resources and support services for this marginalized population.

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Indian Journal of Adult Education 86 (1) 2025, 152-170
https://www.iaea-india.com DOI: 10.5958/0019-5006.2025.00012.9
ISSN 0019-5006

Repositioning Higher Education through Online Learning: Experiences of both Teachers and Learners in Assam

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Abstract

This paper is based on a study carried out among some teachers and learners in the Indian state of Assam during Covid 19 pandemic as well as post pandemic situation to know their experiences with online learning. For the purpose of the study, a total of 480 learners and 220 teachers from the colleges and universities of Assam were randomly selected from across different districts of Assam. A Structured Questionnaire was designed in Google form to know about their perceptions and experiences regarding online and blended learning and their feedback was analysed with the help of Google analytics. This paper shares important findings. Steps like providing equitable access to education, care and justice, ensuring timely delivery of learning contents, utilising suitable methodologies to engage the learners; strengthening learners support services, etc., could emerge as the country wide solutions. The findings are apparently local yet specific and they could initiate a paradigm shift in the teaching-learning pedagogy in the country of tomorrow. This study would help in drawing a roadmap for proper use of online and blended learning in India at the policy level as well as in conceiving the role to be played by the Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in future so that a better and sustainable educational ecosystem could be implemented in India.

Keywords: *Online learning, blended learning, Covid 19 pandemic, sustainable education, repositioning.*

Introduction: The Context

The education systems across the globe had faced an unprecedented crisis following the outbreak of the Corona Virus (Covid 19) pandemic since March 2020 from the effects of which the whole world is gradually recovering today. The

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consequences of the crisis, as supported by a large number of researches, are most apparently felt in the socio-cultural, economic, educational and political arena of the society as a whole. UNESCO and UNICEF (2020) reported that more than 1.5 billion learners from different age groups from around the globe were affected due to the closure of schools and universities which equalled around 90% of the world's total enrolled learners. To slow down or prevent the spread of the pandemic, the heads of several countries followed strict procedures such as lockdowns, partial closure of educational institutions, adoption of social distancing norms, providing flexible working hours to the employees or closing down the work places where people could infect each other. This situation forced all types and levels of educational institutions to operate from a distance and certain emergent online teaching learning practices were put in place to mitigate the crisis.

Around the same time, the Global Education Monitoring Report, 2020 provided an in-depth analysis of the key factors for exclusion of learners in the education systems worldwide including their background, identity and ability (based on markers like gender, age, location, poverty, disability, ethnicity, indigeneity, language, religion, migration or displacement status, sexual orientation or gender identity expression, incarceration, beliefs and attitudes). It identified an exacerbation of exclusion during the Covid 19 pandemic and estimated that about 40% of low and lower-middle-income countries had not supported the disadvantaged learners during temporary school shutdown. Hence, the Report urged all those countries to focus on the left behind learners as schools reopened so as to foster more resilient and equitable societies. Even when the 1st and 2nd phases of the pandemic-induced lockdown hindered the development of the socio-economic and educational sectors across the world, UNESCO revealed that 40% of poorest countries failed to support its learners at risk during the pandemic and urged their inclusion in education. About 10% countries also implemented laws for ensuring full inclusion of education for all.

Regarding access to ICT, NSSO 75th round (2018) mentioned that only 23.8% households in India have internet facilities where the percentage in rural areas is 14.9 % and urban 42.0%. Similarly, the percentage of households with computers as a whole is 10.7% (rural 4.4% and urban 23.4%). Besides, regarding the users' point of view, only 16.5% and 20.1% people of India are able to operate and use the computer and internet facilities (NSSO 2020). In case of Assam, the percentage of households with computers and internet facilities were 7.5% and 17% respectively, which is much lower compared to states like Delhi, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka etc (NSSO 2020). The position of India in terms of rural population with access to electricity is quite good (89%, in the year 2017) compared to some

countries such as South Africa, Namibia, etc. (HDR 2019). As COL (2021) has pointed out, "The poorer the country, the more likely access of online technology and equipment are unequally distributed. In several less economically developed countries, only the wealthy people are able to access streamed video lectures compared to non-wealthy and economically poorer sections of the people. In fact, inequalities in digital learning exist and the same reflect broader social inequalities globally and nationally."

The NEP 2020 also anticipated an increase in government education spending from 10% to 20% by 2030, with an emphasis on supporting higher education, bringing down gender, social and economic gaps, etc. Guidelines for enforcing this inclusive strategy, in particular for allocating funds to different areas, such as K12, STEM education, higher educational institutions, and bridging the digital gap between Tier 1, 2 and 3 cities through implementation of technology in the education sector, were visualised in the Budget 2021. It was expected that through massive investments in ed-tech and blended form of learning, the NEP 2020 would further enhance integrated, experiential and immersive learning while enhancing vocational training and retraining facilities, non-academic education and improving skill growth to increase India's employability ratio that would help to build a modern India (Govt of India 2021). However, in 2023-2024, the department of higher education received a high budget allocation of Rs. 44,094 crores with an increase of 8% over last year.

The Covid 19 pandemic significantly impacted education worldwide, leading to a widespread shift toward online learning. This transition was driven by the urgent need to adhere to social distancing measures and reduce the spread of the virus. But, the compulsion to use online or blended learning by the teachers and learners in a country like India at the initial phase of the pandemic requires to be studied purposively. At a time when both teachers and learners of the ODL institutions embraced online and blended education without much difficulty, how those associated with conventional universities reacted to that need of the hour has to be carefully researched. While, several of the face-to-face teachers and educators were facing the fear of job loss, the role of teachers as facilitators of learning also created new hopes. Thus, capacity building of the teachers for equipping them with the skills of designing and offering education online began to be considered a preparedness drive in post-Covid situations in India. However, it is also important to explore the issues like acceptability of online and blended learning in both conventional and distance learning institutions, response received about online learning from rural and urban areas, differences between colleges and universities in the use of technology, etc., so that need-based policies could be adopted and implemented in the coming days

The present study was undertaken among some teachers and learners of various colleges and Universities in the state of Assam to find out their perceptions about online learning during the pandemic and how their acceptance of technology would help in repositioning higher education in Assam as well as in India as a whole. The purpose of the paper is to discuss the experiences of both teachers and learners while resorting to online teaching-learning during the pandemic, the issues and challenges they faced in the specific context of the Indian state of Assam.

Rationale of the Study

A North East Indian state like Assam is currently having as many as 28 universities and 595 colleges (Educational Statistics, 2021) to accommodate the increasing number of learners in the ambit of education. However, the lockdown caused by the pandemic had also disrupted the educational systems of the entire state. During and after the pandemic, it has been realised that while technology-assisted learning emerged as one of the viable means to overcome the multidimensional challenges caused by the pandemic, questions like availability of internet, proper utilisation of the educational tools, pedagogical issues of distributed and blended learning and the challenges of providing need-based support services to the learners, particularly in the context of higher educational institutions of the country need further investigations. It is equally important to explore the actual impact of the various resilient approaches used by the educational institutions for imparting education during the Covid 19 crisis. This study was undertaken to know the perceptions of the teachers and learners about online and blended learning so that a future roadmap for an adequate techno-friendly learning environment across the state could be framed. Besides, the study also outlined the different ways of identifying the factors affecting the online learning readiness in Assam so that an affordable and accessible techno-friendly pedagogy could be adopted as a model for better teaching-learning experience in the state and the country as a whole.

Review of Literature

A number of researches conducted from India reveal that online and digital education had provided an enriched teaching learning experience during the Covid 19 pandemic putting the traditional models of education into scrutiny.

Bajaj et al. (2021) stated how the Covid 19 pandemic had forced educators to switch to online teaching as the only viable option and to carry out the research, they conducted a survey of 242 university teachers from India during the pandemic based

on Technology Adoption Model (TAM). The research showed that ease and flexibility in the use of technology positively influences teachers' attitude towards online teaching. The researchers expected that such a study would provide a theoretical framework based on TAM to measure the intention and perceptions of the teachers in post-Covid 19 contexts in India. Kamble et al. (2022) stated that the Covid 19 pandemic compelled the educational institutions of India to adopt an online teaching-learning (OTL) methodology. But the same was done without adequate discussion on the acceptance of educational technology by the teachers. The researchers carried out the study using an online questionnaire among the teacher respondents for collecting feedback. The results of the study proposed a valid model to predict technology acceptance by the teachers of India.

Rautela et al. (2022) conducted a study on the role of social media in higher education to encourage Interactive Learning and found that interactions during the online sessions were vital for engaging the learners in the learning process. The results indicated that the learner-learner interactions as well as the teacher-learner interactions were imperative for better and sustained engagement in online teaching. Mathrani et al. (2022) discussed how the issue of digital inequalities while imparting online learning came to the forefront during the Covid 19 lockdown in a developing country like India. For the study, the researchers developed a digital divide framework based on three analytical perspectives–Structure, Cultural practices and Agency—each being influenced by five markers such as—Communities, Time, Location, Social context and Sites of practice. They found that Structural issues are linked with inaccessibility of digital media and supporting services; and Cultural practices indicate gendered discriminatory rules, because female learners reported more stress due to added household responsibilities. Such a situation affected learner agency and posed challenges for learners in meaningfully maximising their learning outcomes.

Based on the above reviews, it can be understood that online education played a catalytic role by offering the most resilient means of education during the Covid 19 pandemic in a country like India despite the most obvious challenges including the digital divide or inequalities. However, acceptance of technology by both teachers and learners, use of social media for teaching learning purposes, issues of mental health of both learners and their parents are some of those problems that will have to be addressed with openness. As no similar studies can be found from the state of Assam, with representative samples from every part of the state, the present study holds much significance.

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the paper are to:

- study the state of online or blended courses offered by the higher educational institutions in Assam (both conventional and ODL);
- learn about the experiences of both the teachers and learners regarding the use of online and blended learning during the Covid 19 pandemic and post pandemic; and
- find out the prospects and challenges of online and blended learning for transacting academic contents in post Pandemic conditions.

Methodology

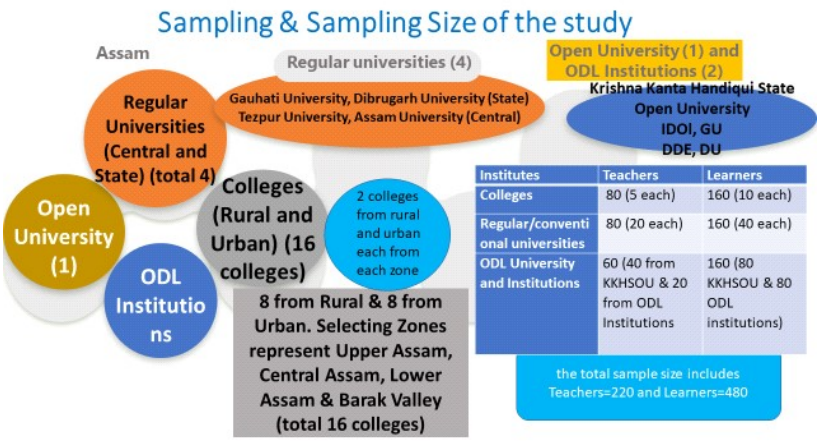
For this study, a survey method was adopted to discuss how the various online and blended learning approaches had been used for academic transaction and also what types of resilient approaches been adopted for providing education during the Covid 19 pandemic and post pandemic situation.

For conducting the research, a total of 480 student respondents and 220 teacher respondents from the colleges and universities (Central, State, Open) and ODL directorates of Assam were selected based on stratification from across different districts of Assam. However, the selection of two colleges from urban and rural areas from each cluster, was based on purposive and convenient sampling. This type of selection would shed light on the differences or inferences in using the online services for teaching-learning transactions.

Regarding universities as samples, out of total 21 universities in Assam, teachers and learners of two state universities namely Gauhati University and Dibrugarh University were selected for the study as these are the oldest state universities in Assam. Apart from them, two other existing Central universities i.e. Tezpur Central University and Assam University, Silchar were also selected. Besides, data was also collected from the teachers and learners of Krishna Kanta Handiqui State Open University, Assam which is the only state open university in the entire North Eastern part of India. Additionally, feedback was also collected from the teachers and learners from two other ODL institutions namely, Gauhati University Institute of Distance and Open Learning (GUIDOL) and Directorate of Open and Distance Learning, Dibrugarh University. Stratified sampling technique was used for selecting the universities and institutions, but for knowing the experience of the teachers and learners about online and blended learning, random sampling technique was used.

As part of the study, a few teachers (220) and learners (480) were randomly selected from the selected universities and colleges across the state, based on convenient sampling. T-test was done in order to see the differences between the students and teachers towards the used of digital and online devices and their experiences. Besides, narrative approach research was also used to know the perceptions of the teachers and learners with the help of Facebook messengers and video calling through WhatsApp.

The framework of selecting universities and colleges is shown in **Fig 1** below:



Tools Used

For collecting data, two sets of open-ended questionnaires had been developed, distributed with a Google Form and the collected data were analysed through Google analytics. Both the questionnaires were divided into three sections.

Section A covered the demographic and general information of the learners and teachers.

Section B enquired about the perceptions and experiences of the teachers and learners on online and blended learning.

Section C contained questions like the basic differences between OERs and MOOCs, awareness level of MOOC under SWAYAM, primary reasons for taking an open online course, credit credentials, best way for content transactions at the time of crisis, awareness about the courses offered by COL, Canada and others for

the lifelong learners, hurdles in accessing online materials, etc. The duration of data collection was for two months from July 2022 to August 2022.

Analysis of Data

a. Responses of the Learners

Regarding learners' responses on online and blended learning in Assam, it was found that they preferred to use online or digital devices for transacting their course contents during the pandemic irrespective of the mode and location of the institutions, etc.

Regarding the profile of the respondents, it was found that out of the total of 160 learners, majority of them (91.7%) were from the age group of 18-24. However, a few learners were also found from the age group of 25-34 and 35-44, as the respondents were from both regular and ODL modes of education. Again, out of the total respondents (480), 52.4% were female and 47.6% male.

The selected respondents were enrolled in various programmes at the colleges and universities across the state. Out of the total respondents, 52% were pursuing Master's programme, and 48% were pursuing Bachelor's Programmes. In respect of the disciplines of the respondents, it was found that 39.9% were from the Humanities, 27.4% from Basic/applied disciplines, and 22.6% from other discipline, i.e., Science and Social Sciences.

The time of enrolment also determine the use of online or blended mode of learning on the part of the learners. Most of the respondents were newly registered and they were quite familiar with the use of technological devices for teaching-learning purposes. This was because the outbreak of the pandemic already facilitated transaction of course contents in online or blended modes across the state of Assam.

Regarding the awareness level of the respondents on the use of ICT based technology, majority of them (91.6%) had the basic idea on the use of ICT and digital devices in accessing the course contents.

In terms of using the most effective ICT based support services during Covid 19 induced lockdown, it was found that 64.1% respondents revealed that mobile app was the most effective tool during the crisis, followed by 51.3% respondents who favoured using websites, 41% digital library, 32.1% learner's portal, 26.9% Learning Management System and lastly 12.8% internet radio, as seen Fig. 2 below.

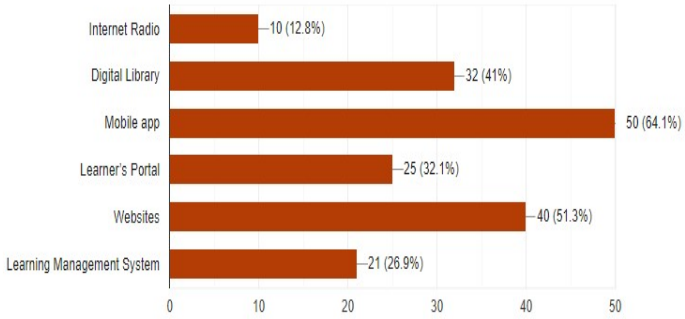


Fig 2: Most effective support services used during the Pandemic

Again, 56.6% respondents revealed that Meeting applications like ZOOM and Google Meet would be the best ways for transacting the course contents followed by Emails, WhatsApp (45.8%), YouTube (44.6%), Google Classroom (39.8%) etc., as visible in Fig.3.

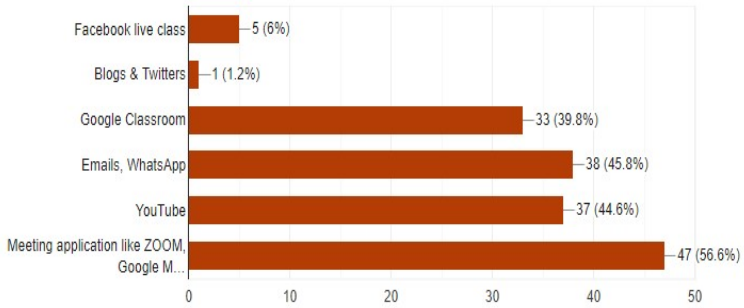


Fig 3: Most effective ways for transacting the course contents during the Pandemic

Regarding the use of social media, learners had different experiences and views. From the study, it was found that 78% learners revealed that YouTube is the most popular social media for disseminating knowledge during the crisis situation followed by WhatsApp and Facebook. The Fig 4 revealed the popularity of the social media as well as remote learning media like TV and Radio during the crisis situation in Assam.

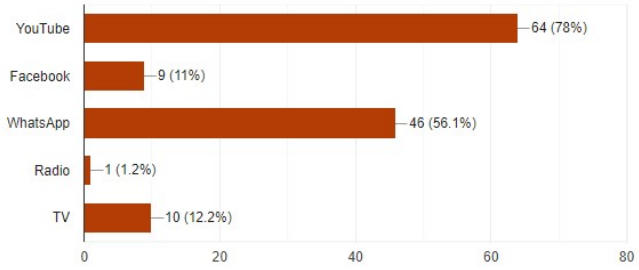


Fig 4: Popularity and Acceptability of the Social and remote media during the pandemic

In the context of popularity of printed text books and E-text books, it was observed that about 83% learners were in support of printed materials, only about 17% learners preferred text books. As the majority of the learners (65.4%) revealed that printed materials are good and better as it can be easily accessible at anytime and anywhere. Again, 19.2% learners opined that E-materials are user-friendly, for some learners (about 14%) the E-materials are beneficial as the problems of not getting the hard copies of SLMs/Text books on time is solved.

Majority of the respondents agreed that the practice of using ICT based devices helped them to build up self-confidence besides upgrading their skills and knowledge about the use of ICT based tools for academic purposes. However, 19.3% respondents were undecided as to how it helped them in terms of skill-enhancement. Fig 12 shows the perception and experience of the learners regarding the use of ICT based devices helped them develop their skills.

Regarding the awareness level of the learners towards the initiatives taken by the government for popularising the online platform or web resources among the learners such as Sodhganga, MOOC courses under SWAYAM platform, etc., it was seen that 47.5% learners were aware of the resources in Sodhganga. The learners at the universities were more aware of the web resources as they used them for the purpose of their research related works.

Again, it was also found that 44.4% learners had enrolled in online courses. However, a majority of them were from regular universities compared to colleges and ODL institutions. But although several learners enrolled in different online courses, only a few of them (a total of 5 learners) completed the courses. Whereas, the rest of the learners revealed the factors behind the hindrance of completing MOOCs.

Regarding the hurdles in terms of accessing online devices during the pandemic, the majority of the learners (77.2%) revealed that poor internet connectivity was the most responsible factor that hindered their access to online support services during the pandemic followed by problems like lack of electricity (10.1%), lack of proper digital services and also the factors like ignorance of using ICT based tools.

Thus, in the above analysis, an overall understanding of the experience of the learners regarding the use of online or blended learning could be gained. From the analysis, it was also found that during the pandemic, irrespective of their background, locality and gender, the learners had to adopt technological devices for getting information and the much-needed academic contents as they tried to fulfil their academic queries mostly through virtual meetings with their mentors, teachers or counsellors.

b. Responses of Teachers

The experience of teachers regarding acceptance and usability of online and blended learning during the Covid 19 crisis was somewhat similar to the responses and feedback provided by the learners. Regarding the profile of teachers, it was found that most of the respondents (45.9%) were from Social Sciences followed by Humanities (27.9%) and Applied sciences (26.2%). Besides, the majority of the respondents were female teachers (55.7%). Regarding the awareness level of teachers in using ICTs for online teaching, it was found that out of total respondents (220), 98.4% were familiar irrespective of the mode, stream of engagement, gender and educational levels. Besides, it was also found that 47.5% and 39.3% teachers agreed and strongly agreed that the use of ICT for transacting the course contents helped them to develop ICT skills.

When the experience of the teachers regarding the use of ICT tools for teaching purposes was considered, it was found that the young teachers were very much interested to use technological devices compared to the teachers of older age groups. Most of the respondents were from the age group of 35 to 44 (54.1%), followed by the teachers of the age group of 25 to 34.

More or less, all teachers used digital devices for transacting the course contents to the learners, as 59% used ZOOM and Google Meet, 54.1% Google Classroom, 39.3% Emails and WhatsApp application, 37.7% YouTube, 26.2% Facebook live class, etc., as is reflected in Fig 5. In fact, it has been observed that the feedback of the teachers was quite similar to those of the learners regarding the most effective ways of academic transaction during Covid 19.

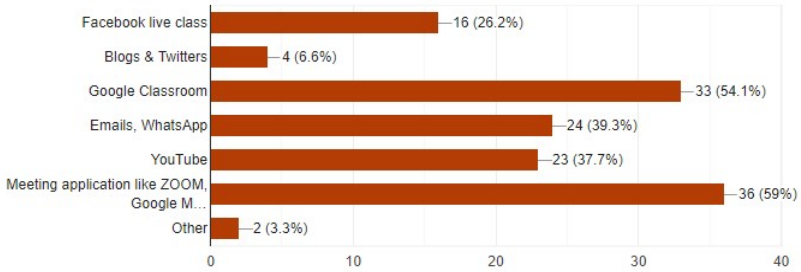


Fig. 5. Most effective ways of transaction during the Pandemic

Regarding the perception of the teachers on social and remote media, it was observed that they had much better perception on the use of TV compared to the learners. 23% and 18% teachers used TV and Radio for education. Regarding social media like YouTube, Face book and WhatsApp, teachers had a positive perception: 62.3% were in favour of WhatsApp, 59% favoured YouTube and 39.3% accepted Facebook as they opined that these social media were the most popular ones in the state irrespective of the location and gender of the teachers and learners as well as the mode of institutions.

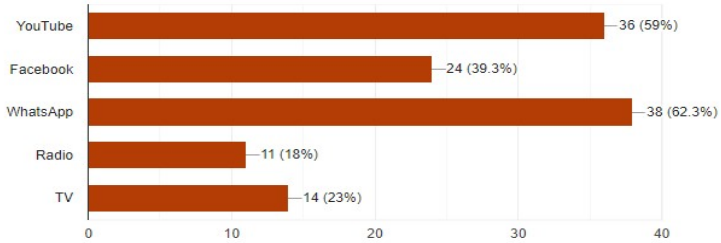


Fig.6. Popularity and acceptability of social media and remote media

The study also tried to explore whether the teachers were willing to enrol in some online courses (like MOOCs) or if they had any prior experiences of having online courses. Only a few teachers (56 teachers out of total, 220) expressed their views about prior experiences of having gone through such courses. Fig 7 shows the perception of the teacher respondents on the acceptability of the online courses. The majority of them (79.4%) were interested to go through the course contents of MOOCs, 38.2% respondents were curious to know about MOOCs and there were also some respondents (23.5%) who were interested to gain skills for enhancing their career and also believed that these courses would help them to get promotion in their current field of employment (particularly the ARPIT Courses of SWAYAM).

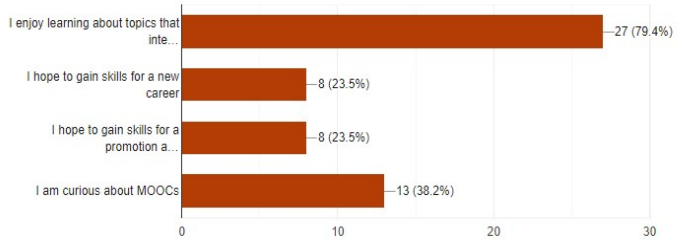


Fig .7. Teachers' Perception on MOOCs

Finally, regarding the hurdles behind the smooth running of the online programmes across the state, it was observed that a major percentage (58.2%) of teachers, like in case of learners, opined that poor internet connectivity in the locality was the main factor for which they could not deliver or access online materials.

Discussion on analysis and summary of findings based on primary data

The following is the summary of major findings of the study.

Parameters	Experiences of the learners	Experiences of teachers
Awareness level towards online learning	About 91.6% learners had the basic idea on the use of ICT and digital devices in accessing the course contents.	98.4% teachers had basic idea on the use of ICT and digital devices in transacting the course contents.
Most effective ICT based support services during Covid 19	56.6% respondents revealed that Meeting applications like ZOOM and Google Meet would be the best ways for transacting the course contents followed by Emails, WhatsApp (45.8%), YouTube (44.6%), Google Classroom (39.8%)	59% used ZOOM and Google Meet, 54.1% Google Classroom, 39.3% Emails and WhatsApp application, 37.7% YouTube, 26.2% Facebook live class etc.
The extent to which the usability of online devices helped the learners in skill development	53% agreed that ICT helped them to develop skills.	47.5% agreed that ICT helped them to develop skills.
Awareness level about the Courses launched under SWAYAM, Sodhganaga	47.5% learners were aware of the resources in Sodhganga and SWAYAM. More learners from universities were more aware of the web resources as they used them for the purpose of their research related works.	58% teachers were well aware of towards the blended and online initiatives taken by the Government in post pandemic situation
Hurdles in terms of accessing online devices during the pandemic situation	77.2% learners revealed that poor internet connectivity in the locality was the most responsible factor	58.2% teachers revealed that poor internet connectivity in the locality was the main factor for which they could not deliver or access online materials.

As stated in the methodology part, the research was based on primary data regarding the feasibility and usability of online and blended learning for which two sets of questionnaires were sent to a few selected respondents (both teachers and learners/learners).

If the findings could be justified through the inferential statistics, it seems that that the mean of teacher's responses and mean of student's responses in respect of different parameters are 116.84 and 273.66 respectively. The S.D. of teachers and learners have been found to be 42.04 and 80.74 respectively. The t-value is found as 5.1126 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, it can be said that there has been a significant difference between teachers' responses and learners' responses in the use of ICT, most effective tools of ICT, benefits of ICT in terms of skill development, and hurdles behind the used of digital services.

Category	**N**	**Mean**	**S.D.**	**t-value**
Teacher	220	116.84	42.04	5.1126
Student	480	273.66	80.74	

Besides, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, also helped in collecting the narrations of a few select teachers regarding their perceptions about online learning as resilient approach during the Covid 19 pandemic and how the learners had to cope up with the crisis situation when the universities were closed down. Based on narrative approach of research, one teacher stated: "*teaching practical classes were very much difficult from home without the laboratory support. I had explored many websites including YouTube how to demonstrate the practical classes to the learners effectively even from the home. I took help the Open Educational Resources (OERs) and finally served the purposes.*" This is the way the lockdown compelled the teachers to become innovators and creators regarding the use of online learning tools as well as developing online contents. Similarly, one of the learners revealed "*learning statistics and mathematics is a difficult task through online alone without face-to-face interaction with the subject teachers. As there was no alternative for physical interaction with teacher for understanding the difficult problems related to mathematics, I had to cope up with the situation and invested more time to become a self-learner, and finally I could solve the problems of the mathematics myself.*" These two narrations are the examples of how teachers and learners took the resilient approaches for continuing their teaching-learning process during the Covid 19 pandemic.

From the above analysis, it was found that both the teachers and learners from the selected colleges and universities of Assam, irrespective of the mode of educational institutions, to be embracing online and blended technology for their teaching–learning process. As there was no other viable alternative during the pandemic, they made the maximum use of online or digital devices for their teaching and learning purposes. However, both the teachers and learners of ODL mode institutions were quite comfortable with online learning as they are much more familiar with such options. Again, regarding the digital division between rural and urban areas in accessing online technology, it was found that there are some variations in terms of accessibility as due to poor internet connection and electricity problems, only a few learners and teachers from the rural areas could manage to transact the course contents during the crisis situation.

One of the interesting findings is that the teachers and learners from the conventional colleges and universities revealed the absence of emotional bonding and attachments that they had in their physical classes before the pandemic. Some college teachers were a bit worried to take online classes which they found difficult to manage. It is because due to the pandemic, they were suddenly compelled to use these kinds of virtual platforms that had never been used before. Besides, without knowing much about the pedagogical issues, they had the urgency to engage in online classes for avoiding the disruption in their teaching. At the same time, despite the acute digital gap, learners from the rural colleges also had the compulsion to use the technological devices for accessing the course contents during the pandemic which was quite difficult for them to manage. This situation led to the absence of the emotional, teaching, social and pedagogical presences in teaching-learning transactions among the teachers and learners.

As reported by many teachers, online teaching-learning helped them a lot in developing peer learning habits as well as in forming personalised and collaborative learning habits among the learners to a great extent through exchanging their ideas in the virtual discussion forum. In fact, during the study, it was felt that online learning helped the learners to open up minds by sharing their ideas with their peers in the virtual world. Still, large scale inequalities and area wise disparities were quite prevalent across the selected colleges and universities of rural and urban areas in the state of Assam.

Recommendations

The study conducted among some teachers and learners of educational institutions of the state of Assam reveals that the proper use of online or ICT based technology, could help in re- positioning the entire higher education system in a country like India. However, as a complex process, Online Learning requires systematic planning, designing and careful formulations of the aims and objectives of education to create an effective learning eco-system. During the Covid 19 pandemic, the higher educational institutions of Assam did try to provide helping hands to the needy learners. By adopting certain common online tools, the colleges and universities of the state did render significant services. Live classes through institutional Facebook page, uploading academic contents in the institutional YouTube Channel, providing learner support services by using institutional websites and mobile app etc., are perhaps some of the most important ways through which the educational institutions could transform themselves in the true sense and face the crisis of corona virus with much ease and confidence.

However, the issue of digital inequalities for a sustained online teaching learning experience is still a major concern in a developing country like India and that is the condition with some of the Indian states too. The Commonwealth of Learning (2021) mentioned about multiple levels of digital inequalities which have far reaching implications—first in accessing hardware, software and Internet connectivity; second, its usage by the socially disadvantaged individuals and groups such as women and girls, racialised groups, indigenous communities and persons with disabilities; and third, discrimination caused by emerging algorithms based on race, gender, age, ethnicity and other social factors. Therefore, the educational institutions of Assam should concentrate on having transformative educational agenda and goals in near future aligning their educational policies with those being framed in other parts of the country or globe, so that all forms of exclusion and marginalisation, gaps, disparities and inequalities could be met. Besides, in the 21st century digital world, maintaining equity, access and inclusiveness in terms of accessing online and blended contents is also a considerable issue for bringing transformation in the society. Skilling, reskilling, upskilling of the people, providing scope of education for lifelong learners would be the other dimensions to develop the socio-economic sectors of the nation in the post pandemic situation.

At the time of the crisis, when people were undergoing trauma, stress and psychological pressure, it should be the social responsibility of the higher educational institutions as well as the local governments to develop the online educational contents

so systematically considering the issues like how to share, collaborate and support each other with the motto of providing 'therapy, empathy and care.' Therefore, pedagogical issues must be undertaken while developing the online course content and delivery. The community theoretical framework or social inquiry model that indicate the presence of teaching, social, cognitive and emotional support in the course modules, could be the best model for developing and producing the online modules for the benefits of the learners. Hence, the educational institutions, mostly the higher educational institutions must try to develop the e-contents or modules in such a way that it would serve the purposes of all the people irrespective of class, caste, location in their locality so that people can access the contents at an affordable cost. Only then, repositioning of higher education through online and blended learning in the true sense shall become a reality in the days to come.

Conclusion

An imperative need exists to promote online and blended learning in Assam, where traditional educational models prevail, heavily reliant on face-to-face instruction. Addressing the challenges of limited electricity, internet connectivity and insufficient technological resources in rural Assam shall be important. Overcoming these obstacles would require leveraging asynchronous technology, fostering group learning and encouraging the sharing of technological devices to ensure timely access to course content. Crucially, pedagogical knowledge must be disseminated among the teachers and learners, empowering them to adeptly utilize technological tools aligned with their academic needs. Concurrently, institutional policies should be formulated to establish a State Open Educational Repository, fostering a knowledge movement within society and benefiting stakeholders. Blended learning models have emerged as a formidable option, particularly in the post-Covid-19 landscape, aligning with the preferences of learners and endorsed by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

Flexible learning models, acknowledged for their resilience during crises like lockdowns, necessitate supportive measures such as fee waivers, enrolment and examination relaxations, and the integration of on-demand and online examinations. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) institutions, like the only state Open University of NE India i.e., KKHSOU, assume a crucial role. By establishing an institutional Learning Management System (LMS), the ODL institutions can provide uninterrupted support to learners and teachers from conventional institutions. The convergence of conventional and ODL institutions becomes imperative to facilitate the exchange of learning resources and technology, a trend exemplified by KKHSOU's relevance

during the pandemic. Looking forward, the educational fraternity in Assam should engage in extensive discussions on the pedagogical aspects of technology integration. Widespread adoption of Hybrid Learning Models is essential for increasing accessibility to online technologies, ensuring continuity of course delivery during crises, and addressing the global educational crisis that saw the hasty implementation of online teaching without proper planning and definition.

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INDIAN JOURNAL OF ADULT EDUCATION

FORM - IV

1. Place of Publication	Indian Adult Education Association 17-B, Indraprastha Estate New Delhi – 110002
2. Periodicity of Publication	Half Yearly
3. Printer's Name	Shri Suresh Khandelwal
Nationality	Indian
Address	17-B, Indraprastha Estate New Delhi – 110002
4. Publisher's Name	Shri Suresh Khandelwal
Nationality	Indian
Address	17-B, Indraprastha Estate New Delhi – 110002
5. Editor's Name	Prof. S.Y. Shah
Nationality	Indian
Address	17-B, Indraprastha Estate New Delhi - 110002
6. Name and Address of individuals who own the newspaper and partners or shareholders, holding more than one per cent of the total capital.	Indian Adult Education Association 17-B, Indraprastha Estate New Delhi - 110002

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The Indian Adult Education Association founded in 1939, aims at improving the quality of life through education, which it visualizes as a continuous and lifelong process. It directs its efforts towards accelerating adult education as a process, a programme, and a movement.

The Association co-ordinates activities of various agencies – governmental and voluntary, national and international – engaged in similar pursuits. It organizes conferences and seminars, and undertakes surveys and research projects. It endeavours to update and sharpen the awareness of its members by bringing to them expert views and experiences in adult education from all over the world. In pursuit of the policy, the Association has instituted the Nehru Literacy Award and Tagore Literacy Award for outstanding contribution to the promotion of Adult Education and Women's Literacy in the country, respectively. It has also instituted Dr. Zakir Husain Memorial Lecture, which is delivered every year by an educationist of eminence.

The Association has brought out many publications on themes related to adult education, including Hindi editions of several UNESCO publications. It brings out the Indian Journal of Adult Education, Proudh Shiksha and IAEA Newsletter.

The Association acts as the Indian arm of the International Council for Adult Education, International Literacy Association and the Asian-South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education. Its membership is open to all individuals and institutions who believe in the aims and objectives of the Association.

Its headquarters is located in Shafiq Memorial, IAEA House at 17-B, Indraprastha Estate, New Delhi - 110 002.

Printed & Published by Suresh Khandelwal for and on behalf of Indian Adult Education Association, 17-B, Indraprastha Estate, New Delhi - 110002, printed at M/s Graphic World, 1686, Kucha Dakhni Rai, Darya Ganj, New Delhi -110 002 and Edited by Prof. S.Y. Shah.