

## **DISTANCE LEARNING IS A BIG CHALLENGE FOR STUDENTS OF KASHMIR: COUNSELLING AS WAY FORWARD**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study aim is to find out the problems of distance learning at district Neelum Azad Jammu Kashmir. Using response of 22 respondents (11 male and 11 female) who are currently doing their education through distance learning from Village Nagdar Kasibpura District Neelum (AJK) used mix method of research for this study. The collected data involving qualitative and quantitative was analyzed by doing thematic technique of research. Many issues like network connectivity, management, financial and lack of motivation were found. Issues are the wake up call for all stake holders, government and educational institutions to take some useful decision. Counselling is suggested as a way forward and solution for such issues and problems.*

**Keywords:** Challenges, responsible, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), illiterate

### **1. Introduction**

Education is born from society, and society is born from education. In practical, we invent that the educational process creates a new society. Concept of distance learning has been existence for at least 200 years; the medium of instruction has been changed from pencil to digital media platform through internet (Galusha, 1998). An alternative method in the field of education in form of distance learning has introduced (Lee Young Kim, 2005). Distance education becomes an excellent strategy for achieving educational goals. It has a pivotal role for promoting education. Distance education suggest that successful education can take place everywhere without physical presence of teacher and learner (Galusha, 1998). After the introduction of Moore's (1973) theory of independent study it become more valuable. Education becomes easier after evaluation of this strategy. This strategy is very useful and helpful for everyone especially for women who faced many difficulties during education. Women empowerment could take place through distance learning (OLAKULEIN, 2006). Education is the most powerful tool for the freedom of mankind. Only effective educational system can bring mental change in the human mind (Sambo, 2000). Socio-economic improvement can only get through powerful education (OKeKe 1995). In the field of education distance learning has brought a revolution. Distance learning has covered a broad spectrum of society such as anyone can get benefit at no great cost. This unique system of education has change the world as whole. Distance learning provides flexibility to learner to connect with their priorities (Galusha, 1998). With the distance learning make technology more recognized. Technology has changed the educational system. Changes in technology have accelerated the development of distance

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learning. Advancement in technology has opened up the ways of personal and group interaction in distance education (Galusha, 1998).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century when there are many challenges like drastic increase in population, financial crisis and many more, distance learning plays a pivotal role to enhance education. Whole problems and challenges can be solved through effective educational system. For effective education there is no need to go to school, college or university. It can easily be done through online learning system.

Education becomes a challenged for rural areas' learner. Learners of district Neelum Azad Kashmir faced many problem while distance learning. This unique study highlighted the major problems and way forward. Main objectives of this study involves:-

1. To find the problems of online learning in district Neelum of AJK.
2. To find why motivation is necessary to promote education?
3. To determine why technology is important for education?
4. To observe "how lack of confidence in using digital technologies change the behavior of learners"?

An open ended questionnaires consists of two questions has been prepared for collection of data. Survey base interview has been conducted for respondent's responses. Complete reliability has been ensured while making tool. Following questions has been asked for collection of data:-

1. What are the problems of distance learning?
2. What are the factors that affect distance learning? Mentioned name.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is the fundamental right of every citizen (Bibi, 2018). Education has considered as a backbone of success in the life. Education is primary hope for sustainable future (Cheng , 2019). Illiterate society cannot grow up and compete the world. Distance education has played a drastic role in promoting education. Distance education has changed the shape of education after evolution.

Education and society are reciprocal of each other. By practicing, education creates new culture (Wamsler, 2020). Education is more than just getting degree. Distance education is challenge for learners of rural areas due to multiple factors, such as technical issues, resources management, and electricity problems (Das , 2021).

The idea of distance learning has been existed for 200 years, however over the last 50 years, advancement in digital gadgets and revolution in technology has changed the scenario of education (BUŠELIĆ, 2012). Various technologies have been used in distance learning which are divided into four categories: print, audio (voice), computer (data) and video (Berg, 1996).

Print material may be served as primary instructional material or may be supplemental in education (BUŠELIĆ, 2012). Being a primary source distance learners might use text material and read it in specific time table. On the other way learners used technology like Gmail for question answer session. Other technologies like social media platform have also been used for learning.

Audio or video technologies have offered cost effective way to enhance distance learning (BUŠELIĆ, 2012). The audio component of distance learning is much simple as learners just use mobile phone or speakers. On the other hand voice mail becoming extreme common. It allows students to leave message to instructor without any bound of time.

With the increasing popularity of internet, computer technologies have been receiving more attention as mean of delivering distance learning (BUŠELIĆ, 2012). The primary computer technologies have been used for distance learning including e-mail, online collaboration, and Web-based learning. Sending messages on e-mail has become a common and easy way to communicate with instructors. Both learners and instructor can benefit through this. Distance learning has changed the overall attitude of learners and instructor after evolution.

In the late 1950's and early 1960's television production technology has been used to conduct classes by teachers (Sherry, 1995). The evolution of television technology has brought positive change in the mind of human being. People have been used television as a source of distance learning. Most TV channels invites scholars to deliver lecture on a specific topic. The major drawback of radio and television technology has one way communication. Only instructor can communicate but learners cannot communicate to instructor, sometime confusions remained in learner's mind ( (SHERRY, 1995).

United States Distance Learning Association defines distance learning as “the acquisition of knowledge and skills through digital instructional and informational technology at a distance” (Williamson, 2002). However, this definition does not distinguished formal and informal education. (Sandra L Richardson, 2012) defines distance learning as “an organized instructional program in which teacher and learner are physically separated”. This definition is much better than the previous one, however it's does not give the full definition of distance learning.

There is no specific definition of distance learning. Most of the definition is similar in meaning but while defining distance learning, first we know the second part i.e learning. Some definition shows learning meaning as behavior (Schunk, 2000), someone with knowledge (Helmut Mayer, 1987), and some deal with both knowledge and observable behavior (Robert E. Slavin, 1994). It showed that there is no specific definition of distance learning. So in general we can define distance learning as “knowledge, behavior and skills that learners can get through digital technologies such as internet, and other social media platform being away from instructor. To get education through distance learning there is a need of internet service and digital gadgets”.

Distance learning involves implementation of information, and technology application more than one location (Jane Webster, 1997). Now a days learners are free to get education

anywhere in the world. They don't feel any type of burden upon them. Even though, it can be easily done along with job. Most of learners are doing job in different organization, along with job they are also getting education through online learning. Most common example is Allama Iqbal Open University, who offers many distance learning program i.e undergraduate, graduate and online post graduate courses. Learners from all over the world are benefited through this method.

Distance learning is a contributing force to socio-economic development. It became essential part of the mainstreaming of educational system in developed and developing countries (BUŠELIĆ, 2012). Globally it contributes very much towards educational system. It has a very vast scope and has not range in the entire world.

### 3. Methodology

Mix method technique of research has been used for this specific study. Mix method technique involves both qualitative and quantities dimensions, and have easy understanding of results it is imported to bring together these two dimensions (Creswell, 2019).

**3.1 Participation.** 22 voluntary participants have participated to share their responses including 11 male and 11 female with equal ratio of 50%. The sampling was done using convince sampling technique. A short interview has been conducted for collecting of data. Participants looked very confident while giving responses. Female participants were also very energetic while giving answers. Base line information is mentioned at Table 1.

Table 1 (Base line information)

	Frequency	Total	Percentage
Male	12	24	50
Female	12	24	50

**3.2 Data Collection Tool.** An open ended questionnaire consisting of two questions has been prepared for collection of data. Survey based interview has been conducted to collect data from participants. Following are the specific question of questionnaires:-

1. What are the problems of distance learning?
2. What are the factors that affect distance learning? Mentioned each.

**3.3 Data Collection and Implementation Process.** Data has been collected in one day and in one round. Interview has been conducted to collect data. Questionnaire has been presented to participants for their responses.

### 4. Analysis

In order to analyze the quantitative data manual technique of percentage and frequency has been used. However, for qualitative data thematic analysis technique has been used. Table 4.1 shows the complete analysis:-

Main Theme	Sub-theme	Code	Percentage	Frequency
Technical Issues	Internet Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voice dis-connectivity</li> <li>• One-way audio</li> <li>• Multiple Login</li> <li>• Less attendance</li> <li>• Issue of not use of technical gadgets</li> </ul>	91	22
Management Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Time Management</li> <li>➤ Resource Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mismatch lecture timing</li> <li>• House work load</li> <li>• Fear of misuse of Mobile phone</li> <li>• Less organized contents</li> </ul>	79	19
Financial Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Internet Connectivity</li> <li>➤ Fees Issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost of packages</li> <li>• Fees issues</li> </ul>	75	18
Lack of Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Illiterate family environment</li> <li>➤ Lack of parents interest</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of family support</li> <li>• Not knowing the benefit of education</li> </ul>	71	17
Parents Behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Bad parent relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Father and mother are quarreling with each other</li> </ul>	54	13
Future not secure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lack of jobs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education has no benefits</li> <li>• Many degree holders are without job</li> </ul>	50	12

## 5. Findings

**5.1 Technical Problems: Internet Connectivity.** First objective was to find out the problem through which online learning affects. The majority of learners were found with problem of

internet connectivity. In district Neelum of AJK there is only one network “SCOM” is currently working. Network is directly proportional to electricity, when there is electricity load shading the network automatically goes. Moreover, if there is heavy rain and bad weather network is not available in those days. Sometime voice disturb due to weak signal and multiple login, learners became angry and want to put down the mobile phone or laptop. Some learners feel boring while listening one way audio, they thought that there should be question and answer section. Multiple login also create hurdle while delivering lectures. Another big problem is less confident while using technical gadget. Learners are not too much aware to use technology.

**5.2 Management Problems: Time/ Resource Management.** A maximum range of learners were found with house work load. They have animals at houses and have to look after them. Mostly classes and lectures missed due miss time management. It was also found that many learners especially women were hesitating while use the mobile phone. They were forced by the family members to limited use of mobile phone. They thought that mobile phone would be miss use. Some time they do not ask questions to instructor or fellow. It cased the failure in outcome of distance learning. Some learners were afraid about contents. They thought that online learning content does not match with the required standard. Most learners decided to leave the education.

**5.3 Financial Problems: Internet Connectivity/ Fees Issues.** Two-third majority of learners were found with internet high cost packages and fees related issues. SCOM network provides high cost internet packages i.e Rs. 350 for 7 days and Rs. 1000-1200 for month. There is no special offer of internet package is available there for students. Learners especially women cannot afford internet packages price. Majority of learners were afraid about semester fees. Women learners found with money problem as they have no source of income. They are dependent upon father, brother and husband.

**5.4 Lack of Motivation: Lack of parent’s interest/ Illiterate family environment.** Second objective was to find out how motivation is mandatory to promote education. Mostly, illiterate parents and families were found. Illiterate parents do not know the benefit of education. They have no interest of education for their children. They do not support and appreciate their child for education. Parents are more focused towards cultivating land and look after the animals. They thought animals would be most benefited instead of education. Towards women their thought is totally different. They though women are just made up for house work, to born child and look after them. They do not motivate women to get education.

**5.5 Parent Behavior: Bad parental relationship.** More than 50 percent learners were found with bad parental relationship. Mostly, their father and mother are quarrelling with each other. It cases negative impact on the mind of children. One of woman has shared that multiple time she thought to stop education but his interest didn’t permit her.

**5.6 Future not secure: Lack of Job.** 50 percent learners were found who were afraid of their future. They were afraid due to the current economic and political condition of the country. They relate the political condition of country direct to economic prosperity. They thought that if

economy can't grow without political stability and if economy of country not grows, there would be least chances of creating new jobs.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendation

No doubt distance learning in rural areas of Azad Kashmir especially in District Neelum becomes a big challenge for learners. This problem cannot be solved without the collective effort of all stake holders, educational institutions, organizations and government. Here are some solutions through which this issue can be solved.

Firstly, it might be controlled the issue of poor connectivity if Telecommunication Authority working in AJK increase number of network like Zong, Telenor, Jazz and other. It will not be enough to only increase network but also required to provide better internet serves twenty-four hours without any break. Also take action against those service providers who do not provide service continuously. Service providers should require introducing student packages. Distance learners internet packages should be introduced for learners by each network at low cost so that each learner can easily activate. Secondly, Azad Jammu Kashmir electricity department is required to provide electricity twenty-four by seven without any shortage or load shedding. Local power supply project should apply there so that electricity problem can control. Thirdly, Ministry of Education and Higher Education Commission (HEC) is required to conduct motivation seminar on weekly basis to deliver lecture on the importance of education through experts at tehsil level and also announce date of motivation seminar through digital media and print media. It might be helpful for parents who are illiterate and don't know the importance of education. Fourthly, those educational institutes who offer distance learning education especially Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is required to provide free education upto Higher Secondary Level and provide special or need base scholarships for those students who don't pay their fees in district Neelum. Government should provide free education for women upto graduation level. Fifthly, mostly people did not know Quran O Sunna very well so, it would be better for religious scholars to conduct seminars on the importance of husband-wife relationship in accordance with Quran O Sunna. Not only religious scholar but anyone who have knowledge on the particular topic can educate them. Local Imam Masjid (Qari) in this regard can contribute and teach them how to live better life. Sixthly, government should require taking certain steps for improvement of economy like promote small business, stop corruption, take strict action against corruption and do legislation to make laws. All political parties and stakeholders should come to gather and discuss the economic related issues. Counselling is suggested as a way forward and solution for such issues and problems.

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