

**ROLE OF COMPUTER IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING AS A LEARNER
SUPPORT SERVICES- A STUDY****Ravindar Reddy, Ph. D.***Secondary Grade Teacher, Government M.P.P.S, Sugurugadda Tanda, Mahabubnagar,
Telangana***Abstract**

Network-based learning is now such an important area that it would seem timely to examine progress to date and to draw conclusions regarding the direction of further research. This paper is the result of a survey of computer systems for distributed and distance learning, focusing on projects that help to illustrate the evolution of this important field. An examination such as this is important in its own right as a resource for other researchers wishing to pursue the subject further, but the survey also helps to highlight some of the major trends of past projects and to suggest some of the ways in which progress may be made in the future. The use of computer technology in education can change the learning style in several ways. This paper seeks to explore the level of computer application in ODL. The study also focuses on finding out the differences in computer application among the ODL students with respect to gender. The sample consists of 100 male and 100 female students from selected ODL students in Hyderabad city. To collect the data the researcher developed the questionnaire to measure the level of computer application. The results indicated that 68.8% students showed medium level of computer application. Further it was observed that Male students showed better computer application than female students. The study suggests that innovative curricula should be designed to give more emphasis on computer application. Further, Peer teaching related to computer applications among students can be emphasized to enhance the female students' computer application ability.

Keywords: *Role of Computer, Open Distance Learning, Learner Support Services.*



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INTRODUCTION:

Students use computers to learn variety of subjects, create projects, sort and synthesize information, communicate with teachers and also with other students around the world. Supporting this, **Collins & David, (1991)** expressed that “the integration of new technology in the classroom is very helpful for students learning” and makes learning more interactive (**Madian, 1991**). A quasi-experimental study by **Webster & Linda, (2005)** revealed that students with higher computer literacy will also have higher computer use confidence. Thus the use of computer technology in education can change the learning style

of the children in several ways and helped them to enhance their education process in a very short period of time. Moreover, internet has changed the way people work by giving them an access to vast information on any subject. **Murphy (1995)** summarizes the learning outcomes that result from the use of technology in ODL as following: (1) social growth, (2) problem solving, (3) peer teaching, (4) independent work, and (5) exploration.

National Policy on Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

The ICT Policy in ODL system of Education aims at preparing youth to participate creatively in the establishment, sustenance and growth of a knowledge society leading to all round socioeconomic development of the nation and global competitiveness. The mission of the policy is to devise, catalyze, support and sustain ICT and ICT enabled activities and processes in order to improve access, quality and efficiency in the ODL system.

NEED FOR THE STUDY:

The growth in science and technology is overwhelming. The forces are impossible to prevent and they provide challenges and opportunities for people in the field of education. Education today should enable students to meet the challenges ahead and demands of the working environment and of daily living. Thus, students not only need knowledge but also technological skills in the years ahead.

The use of computers in education opens a new era of knowledge and offers a tool that has the potential to change some of the existing educational methods. The teaching fraternity is the key to the effective exploitation of this resource in the educational system. As computer use continues to increase in society, teachers and students must also equip themselves for the use of computers within and outside the classroom. This involves all levels of education. (**Mc Cannon & Crews, 2000**). Supportively **UNESCO (2002)** also aims to ensure that all countries, both developed and developing, have access to the best educational facilities necessary to prepare young people to play full roles in modern society and to contribute to a knowledge nation. In many developed and developing countries, most of the schools are getting equipped with the infrastructure to conduct computer mediated teaching and learning. But the success of any initiatives to implement computer technology in an educational program depends strongly by the active involvement of students in computer application. Hence, it is very important to examine the usage level of computers at ODL level. A key concern of this study was to study the level of computer application by students and to find out the differences in computer application among the male and female students.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the level of computer application by ODL students.
2. To find out the differences in computer application among ODL students with respect to gender.

SAMPLE OF THE STUDY:

Sample selection was done in two stages (1) Selection of place: It was selected Hyderabad city only. (2) Selection of Students: 100 male students and 100 female students were selected, who perceived their degree in distance mode.

TOOLS USED FOR THE STUDY:

Since the standardized tool was not available to achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher developed a questionnaire to measure the level of computer application of ODL students.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

1. **Objective-1:** To study the level of computer application by ODL students.

Table 1 shows the computer application level of ODL students

Computer application Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low	82	8.2%
Medium	688	68.8%
High	230	23%
Total	100	100%

It is found that among all students when divided into their interest and knowledge level, 23% of students have shown high level of computer application and 68.8% of students showed a medium level of computer application but only 8.2% of students showed low level of computer application. Lack of proper training, practical exposure, etc. may be the cause for the low level of computer application.

2. **Objective-1:** To find out the differences in computer application among students with respect to gender.

Table 2 shows the number and percentage of total male and female students having low, medium and high computer application level.

Computer application level	Students		Total
	Male	Female	
Low	10(10%)	07(07%)	17
Medium	69(69%)	65(65%)	134
High	28 (28%)	21 (21%)	49
Total	100	100	200

From the above table, it can be seen that only 07% of male and 10% of female students were in the low computer application level, whereas 65% of male and 69% of female had medium levels of computer application. Further 28% of male and 21% of female students had high level of computer application. Supporting to this information, the following table expresses the significant difference in the computer application students with respect to gender.

Table 3 shows the gender, number, mean, S.D. and t-value of ODL students with respect to computer application.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	Significant/not Significant
Male	100	9.22	1.90	3.946	S*
Female	100	8.73	2.0		

From the analysis it is found that mean scores of male students is 9.22 and female is 8.73 with a S.D. of 1.90 and 2.00 respectively, t-value (3.946) is found to be significant at 0.05 level, hence the null hypothesis „There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students with respect to computer application“ is rejected and in other words there is a significant difference between the mean scores of male and female students with respect to computer application.

CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY:

Despite the impressive scale of some of the projects described in the previous sections, it is clear that much of the research performed on systems for distributed and distance learning has been narrow in scope, in that the approaches and systems have focused on highly specific facets of the CAL problem such as the needs of a particular course, means of communication, provision for practical work, interactive demonstrations, and so on. This is not a criticism, but recognition of the simple fact that there is still much work to be done and many problems to be overcome before general-purpose CAL frameworks become available. What is yet to be attained is a true Learner Support Environment (LSE) ñ an integrated system which can draw upon the experiences of these earlier developments and yet offer a flexible solution easily adaptable to a variety of student and course needs.

There are a number of general observations that can be made concerning the systems described above. At the most abstract level, it may be seen that systems aimed at distributed learning have had a distinctly different focus from those aimed at distance learning. Research into distributed learning systems has tended to concentrate on methods and styles of delivering courseware to students, or on supporting practical work, whereas work on distance learning systems has usually been concerned with facilitating or enhancing communication

among students and tutors. That said, a theme common to both camps is the aim to provide adjunct support rather than to replace traditional teaching methods entirely. This perhaps suggests that practitioners are still uncertain as to how to make best use of the new media, and hence that there is a clear need for further investigation in this regard.

The findings of the study show 67% students showed a medium level of computer application. This is an indication that the computer application is not taking place at the fullest level. Further it was observed that Male students showed better computer application than female students.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY:

Following implications are drawn from the present study.

1. A practical suggestion would be too called upon the government, management and University to come out with policies that would make computer application mandatory teaching learning process.
2. Design innovative curricula giving more emphasis on computer application.
3. Peer teaching related to computer applications among students can be emphasized to enhance the female students' computer application ability.
4. Special training for female students' to be arranged by Government, management and University to enhance computer application among female students.

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