

Vol. 7

Special Issue 2

March 2020

P-ISSN: 2321 - 788X

NAAC Score: 2.13



SHANLAX
INTERNATIONAL JOURNALS

editor@shanlaxjournals.com | www.shanlaxjournals.com

A Peer-Reviewed-Refereed-Scholarly Indexed Quarterly Journal

A.P.S EDUCATIONAL TRUST

National Seminar on

National Education Policy-2019
Issues and Challenges

Organised by

English & Humanities Department



Acharya Pathashala Evening
College of Arts and Commerce

N. R. Colony, Bangalore, Karnataka



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In recognition of the Publication of the Paper Entitled
*A Descriptive study on
Administration of India education System*

Published in

SHANLAX INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF ARTS, SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES

Dr. N. Ayyanathan
Editor in Chief

Er. S. Lakshmanan
The Publisher

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH GENDER EQUALITY

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Introduction

"India is a country of grand contradictions. While it is a global leader in the knowledge economy, it is also home to more than half the world's poor and illiterate people, most of whom are women." (Reddi & Sinha 2004). The sex ratio improved slightly from 933 in 2001 to 940 in 2011. The gender gap between male (82.14%) and female (65.4%) literacy rates remain high at 17.10 as per 2011 Census. It is an important fact that no society will progress satisfactorily unless women, who constitute almost half of their population are given equal opportunities. The first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "To awaken the people, it is women who must be awoken; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves" (quoted in Pillai, 1995; p. 62). So there is a greater need for bringing women into mainstream of development of India. ICT opens up a direct window for women to the outside world. Information now flows to them without distortion or any form of censoring, and they have access to same information as their male counterpart. ICT are closely linked to power and the ability to affect change. It can create new opportunities by expanding information flows and by making communications more accessible, people living in poverty can make better choices, voice their opinions, demand their rights and have more power over their own lives.

Information technology has become a potent force in transforming social, economic, and political life globally. More and more, development strategists see the need for developing countries to embrace information technology both as a way to avoid further economic and social marginalization as well as to offer opportunities for both growth and diversification of their economies. Women within developing countries are in the deepest part of the divide, further removed from the information age than are the men whose poverty they share. The gender gap in the digital divide is of increasing concern; if access to and use of these technologies is directly linked to social and economic development, then it is imperative to ensure that women in developing countries understand the significance of these technologies and use them. If not, lack of access to information and communication technologies becomes a significant factor in the further marginalization of women from the economic, social, and political mainstream of their countries and of the world. Without full participation in the use of information technology, women are left without the key to participation in the global world of the twenty-first century. ICT can be a powerful catalyst for political, social and types of empowerment of women, and the promotion of gender equality. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 drew attention to the emerging global communications network and its impact on public policies, as well as the attitudes and behavior of individuals. It called for the empowerment of women through enhancing their skills, knowledge, access to and use of information technologies. It also included a strategic objective: "Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision making in and through mass media and new technologies of communication".

Our Honorable President Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam calls this revolution of information as a nationwide movement to make India a superpower by using ICTs in both rural and urban areas. The development and proliferation of electronically communicated

International Journal of Innovative Practice and Applied Research (IJIPAR)