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Introduction:

Interest is increasing in open learning and distance education in developed and developing countries to be part of education systems in them because it has power which could push the social and economical development. Interest of this sort of learning has come because of great developments which are taking place in Information Communication Technology (ICT), on the other hand in order to modernize the human skills. The world has witnessed a huge development in education and training as a result of huge increase in the population, without any doubt, such changes of events and revolution of knowledge have a direct impact on the ordinary methods of education which may not be able to face the new challenges of our times.

The phenomenal growth of distance and open learning systems all over the world has dramatically changed the educational scenario everywhere today. The conventional notions about teaching-learning are being replaced very fast by new ideas and strategies. This because of the revolutionary changes continuously taking place in the media and communication. As the concept of education as investment is also steadily gaining ground, the poorest countries are slowly turning their attention to the educational needs of their respective populations in order to survive and develop. Distance education has been viewed by many as a viable strategy to achieve the national educational goals quickly and at low costs.

At present, there are 1300 distance and open learning institutions of different types and sizes located in 127 countries. The number of distance learners is approximately 90 million at the higher education level. In India alone as per the latest data available in 2001, there are about 70

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distant teaching units called Correspondence/Distance Education Departments located within conventional universities.(Ramanujam.2001)[1]

As a matter of fact, the results of foregoing discussion, the education in general, higher education (universities) and their institutions in particular became part of our today's life; and they have witnessed complete changes and development in comparison to what they were. Universities do not only present services, but they also become productive units which give contribution in developing human resources and their roles focus on three directions such as:

- Extending knowledge by teaching and training.

- Developing knowledge by scientific research.

- Application knowledge by social services.

These roles correspond with what American Ministry of Education determined (Education-research- human services). (Lee, 1971)[2]

The UNESCO has adopted the open learning term and distance learning to point out the learning where the learner is at distance from his /her learning place. Open learning appeared at the end of the nineteenth century. It became an opportunity for individuals to study regardless their geographical places or economical and social status (UNESCO, 2002). American Community for Distance Learning defines O.L as "acquirement of familiarities and skills through mean to connect formation and education including all the technology types for distance learning.(http:www.usdla.org). According to Daniel, distance learning is that education which depends on technology and free from limits of distance learning, places and time.(Daniel,1996)[3]

In its published papers, Al-Quds Open University **QOU** defines open learning as a sort of distance learning open and flexible with facilities supports the learner to study regardless of his/her age, work and living

place and deal with educational obstacles through means, methods and techniques to reduce these obstacles. (Al-Quds Open University, 1987).

The society can't achieve the comprehensive and balanced development unless its individuals participate consciously and positively in its development. Development can't be achieved in any country unless it makes use of human being. So it differs from other sources ,hence it is not subjected for purchasing or storing, though the manpower is the most important source of national economy, meanwhile it can be corporate in both consumption and production besides national income process. (Fahmy.2003)[4]

In modern times which is the Era of technology and expanding of working aspects the consciousness of human has been developed as target and mean in development process.

Based on the studies, researches and investigations have differed in limiting the concept of human development, it analyzing its formations, satisfying the basic needs and social development, forming the humane capital and improving the quality of life.

Any society must have a number of social systems to exist and continue such as family, economical, political, religious, educational system etc. These systems are slowly changing which hinder progress and improvement operations. So, the society should approach programmed style in order to permit it's individuals the opportunity to fulfill their aims and aspirations. Therefore, this systematic style or approach is called social development.

Lately many developing countries had approached this style ever since they became independent states.

Perhaps, the availability of higher effective education system helps individuals to change and improve their situations, ensures the opportunity for social mobility and to have better future. (Khadeer.2006)

Social Development

Social development is a process in which the transformation of social structures in a manner to improve the capacity of the society to fulfill its aspirations. Society develops by consciousness and social consciousness develops by organization. Not all social change constitutes development. It consists of four well- marked stages: survival-growth-development- and evolution, each of which contains the other three within it. Development implies a qualitative change in the way the society carries out its activities. While the term (social development) is usually applied to changes that are beneficial to society.

Social Development encompasses commitment of individuals and the opportunity for citizens to determine their own needs and to influence decisions which affect them. Social development incorporates public concerns in developing social policy and economic initiative. Social development involves multiple levels of engagement at the level of individuals, social groups, and society. As a practical definition, social development can be described as the process of increasing the assets and capabilities of individuals to improve their conditions, the capacity of social groups to exercise their rights, transform their relationships with other groups, and participate in development processes, the ability of society to reconcile the interests of its constituent elements, govern itself peacefully, and manage change.

According to Nazzal human resource development, "is the increasing knowledge, abilities, skills for manpower which enable him/her to work in all aspects and is selected according to experiments which have been tried to promote the productive competency for life level."

Moreover, Nazzal added," to the dimensions of social development it is the care of human development in various aspects in order to develop

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the human abilities, his/her psychological, social, skillful, and spiritual abilities." Nazzal. (2006)[5]

Among the recent stresses for increasing the qualified and trained human resource which are capable to face the challenges in these days, so the Palestinian Society in this case needs more to participate it's women in developing plans and integrating them in the projects which aspire to improve the life quality. In addition, to find better environment for any human being who has appropriate education and training to face the recent challenges such as ; cultural, social, political and economical challenges.

Therefore, the development process needs to utilize all the material and human powers though the most important investing issue in any developing country is to improve it's human power resources. No doubt, as said women form the half of human resources this can apply economical and social programs, besides they have a role in forming the children's character or developing the underage human resources.

One of the main obstacles of Palestinian society development, besides occupation which keeps women's development isolated, women's vital role is ignored and denied in Palestinian developing plans. Therefore, the woman stayed in undervaluing situation, meanwhile the society couldn't surpass its economic and social crises. The development process is an integral aim to promote human being without differentiation between its sectors. So, it should include all the society sectors, the value system must get rid of the negative undeveloped economic and social woman status.

Gabbash's point of view says "we should do the best to get rid of the restriction of customs and habits which hinder women's participation to develop their skills and abilities, so as to develop the society in general. However, woman's development efforts should start with education, after

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that, to conclude professional and technical training and qualifying her through using the best technology ". Gabbash. (2005)[6]

A few researchers refer to the reduction of woman's participation to factors which are related to marginized woman to prepare her to participate in public life such as opportunities given for man hence, to qualify her for specific jobs. This may reflect the prejudice the woman faces in employing aspects. In general, if the developing countries starve from external utilization and compulsion in international imbalanced economy system, the woman will starve from double and special utilization , and as a social sector she has prejudicial privacy not only by economical spheres but also, by ideological ones, and the later more dangerous and less clear. In developing countries woman occupies less stages in employing aspects, meanwhile she works in narrow aspects gives her little wage rates (Dailami.2005).

No doubt, what mentioned above hinders the woman's motivation towards work and increasing psychological frustration that faces her. So, the woman misses real motivation to get more concern in developing her professional, occupational, and administrational abilities and skills, regardless woman status as a wife, mother, employee, worker, whether she is rural or urban. (Hilwy.2007)[7]

So the woman couldn't do the expected role in developing her society except, if she has got her share of comprehensive care and suitable education, especially modern life is considered as complicated and developed. Uneducated woman these days is one of undeveloped society features and the most dangerous obstacle of cultural, political, and social developed in the society (Tnoobi.2001).

If the development was the ideal investment for all human and material possibilities in the society in order to make the wanted development, it should not confined to one side of life as it concludes all the social,

economic, cultural, political, educational, logical and administrative sides, therefore the human being is the essential element of development, just as he/she is the development aim. In addition, the success of development programs and its constituency is conditioned by the human participation and well preparation.

Human Development and Social Development.

There is a correlation between human development and social development, hence the human development concept has recently been more current because it included many development aspects that were being treated separately. Additionally, for this comprehensiveness it is based on simple equation as on the one hand it represents people acquisition for capacities on the other hand, it releases investing opportunities .It should be noticeable to consider that the abilities and acquisition of people.(the first part of equation) to realize the correlation between social development and human development .

So, acquisition of abilities is based on the acquisition of knowledge and learning including the skills acquisition. As, if these basic things are not achieved, the possibility to obtain other opportunities would be away. (Sabbagh.2005)

Since the concept of the social development includes: poverty fighting and malnutrition, therefore it is considered as one of the basic elements to achieve human development which is interested in obtaining health, skill and knowledge as basic role to inter other opportunities.

Open learning has become a mean which decision makers aspire for its multiple advantages. Whether open learning could participate in developing the women sector in the developing countries especially the sector that has faced many obstacles by the illiteracy and lowering educational level and social stress.

Education to women is considered essential especially higher education to develop their social and economical status so to help them to adapt with the emergent changes and to be protected from utilization (Kanwar and Tophin, 2001).

Any society should facilitate women's education and make it include the broadest sector. Clearly, those societies which do not invest in women's education and in their health, their economy will be blocked and face obstacles regarding productivity, beside, lowering welfare level and population growth increase. (Women's International Network News 1990).

UNESCO report points out that women learning is the most important investment towards the future whether the objective is to develop hygienic status or to increase the registered children in schools in order to reach developed social life, so the communities efforts will not succeed if they are not interested in mother's education and developing women situations (UNESCO, 1996). Though, the greatest challenges which face women to complete their high education are the lack of financial supplies and the change in family responsibilities which made women in perfect worry from inability to conform between their education and their responsibility as mothers in addition to the inferiority look which says or believes that education is more important to men than women (Kanwar and Taplin, 2001).

Adopting the idea of women support to get benefit from open learning method in companying the flexibility in learning as a result of huge technological improvements could be an ideal way to decrease the negative effect for these challenges and social cultural requirement. So open learning may bring a lot of opportunities which enable women to improve their cultural level which no doubt will reflect their economical and social level.

The international literature which is related to the study topic points at many achievements that have been made by women because of open learning and achieved opportunities that women were not able to reach without education. That impact on their achieved status, which is a social position, a person takes voluntarily and reflects personal ability and merit. **Social status:** A recognized position in a society having a distinct role associated with carrying a certain amount of prestige relatives to other positions. A status is a slot in the structure of the society which is occupied by individuals. More loosely, the rank or amount of prestige or esteem accorded to an individual by the members of society (Vivelo,1978).

According to Al-Quds Open University curricula social status is defined as "it is a rank which is occupied by the individual in the society in comparison with others". (QOU.2005)[8]

Normally, societies mean to classify individuals in up or down according to specific social criteria. So, people competed to gain social status in the society. Aspiration to achieve high status in the society is considered as an old process as a human himself. For instance, in primitive societies the competition between individuals was at hunt, therefore the most skillful hunter was considered the one who occupied high status in the society, and achieved this status for his power related to the amount of food he had gathered, while one who couldn't hunt was considered inferior to others, because he depended on his life on what others gave.

The interest of woman's issue and her participation in developing her countries has become from developing saying ,"the human wealth is the maker of wealth, since the human development must be involved in the woman empowerment as a basic ground to make the human wealth and support its execution, organizing its abilities, promoting its status, changing its awareness about herself to be able to choose, to have aloud

voice in protecting her interests and to be able to participate and take resolutions and influence in daily life events.(Dailami.2005)

In spite of the concern Palestinian woman issues it has not been regarded in its narrow frame as a relation between males and females only, or through woman's control instead of men. Since the concern has become through social and developing comprehensive dimensions. As this vision drives away the common belief in all those societies, that every woman's advantage means man's disadvantage.

Many research results have dealt with problems and woman's issues besides, the challenges which face her and reduce her empowerment, as matter of fact these social challenges affect profoundly on woman's compulsion through weeding her role to be subjected to man's control, therefore, the inequity between male and female, has found the most common prejudice which functions at spreading, negatively on half society population.

No doubt, that the real development means creating better circumstances beside training, learning new skills, psychological health and keeping her rights, as the social development success requires to set the woman free economically, culturally and out of man's compulsion, also to increase her opportunities and participation in society development.

The woman's educational situation in any society can't be separated from her social situation and by the same taken her social role both in family and society. Moreover, as a matter of fact, the woman's educational situation can't also be separated from educational situation and its status, besides, its role in the social frame.

Female education is considered one of the issues which has been processed by civil communities and world governments. The international conference held in Dakkar, 2000 was considered a main point in this aspect. Hence, research studies have shown that unless

women's education is not promoted to the same stage of men's education, real social development will not be achieved. Consequently women's education may be more useful for social development than men's education.(Teashory.2005)

Similarly, the international conference about (Education For All,1990) emphasized on, the divergence and shortcoming if not promoting woman's education to the same state of man's education, that will give reverse results to development such as: lost opportunities to raise the wages and the production besides the life level. After that, female education must have taken the most priority and should improve its quality, furthermore removing all the obstacles which prevent woman's participation in development as effective manner, also all rigid ideologies which distinguish between male and female in education and learning should be removed. Therefore, woman's education has many advantages such as; birth control, as when woman's education goes up the number children goes down. On the other hand, whenever woman's education improves her concerns in her children rises and this leads to increase the cognitive capabilities of children in preschool stage. (Akomolafe.2006)

Distance Education is regarded as the key factor in overcoming the barriers that women face and the basic tool for empowering women and bringing them into the main stream of development. Education not only provides knowledge and skills to improve health and livelihoods, but it also empowers women to take their right place in the society and development process. Education gives status and confidence in decision making. Educating women is the key to reducing poverty. The need for women education's is emphasized all over the world this fact is presented by Sharma, U and Sharma, M.B (2004) as they emphasized that one of the greatest needs is to spread education among women. As a matter of fact there is a room for the extension of education even among men. The

condition of women's education is, however, such that any attempt as its spread deserves help and encouragement from all quarters.

Women's status and education in the society are interrelated. All over the world, movements have been carried on to change the situation of illiteracy as stated by Bhatt, D.B and Sharma, R.S (1992)   that the movement for improving women's status all over the world has always emphasized education as the most significant instrument for changing women's subjugated position in society. Women education has an important role in the development of nations. The literacy rate of the women has its impact on the economical condition and reduction of the poverty of the country. (Bukhsh.2007)[9]

According to the mentioned this leads us to another close concept that is empowerment.

Issues in Women Empowerment

The need for empowerment arises from the inability of an individual or a group of people to accomplish their dreams and reach their greatest potentials due to artificial barriers created by individuals and other groups within the same society.

To Oxfam (1995) Empowerment involves challenging oppression which compels millions of people to play a part in their society on terms which are inequitable, or in ways which deny them their human rights Okeke (1995)[10] submitted that "to empower means to give power to, to give authority to, to enable a person or a group of persons gain power". Batliwa (1995) in her definition of the term empowerment stated that:

"Empowerment is the process and the result of the process Whereby the powerless or less powerful members of the society gain greater access and control over material and knowledge, resources, challenges and ideologies of discrimination and subordination and transform the

institutions and structures through which unequal access and control over resources is sustained and perpetuated.(Olakulehin.2006)[11]

As well as Kabeer defined it "Expanding the people abilities in order to control strategic options in their life as they were deprived from such abilities." (Kabeer, 1999)[12]

Foregoing definitions show that empowerment implies that an individual or a group had hitherto lacked power or authority by circumstances, denial or default. The issue of women empowerment has become a part of popular debate. It has however been misconstrued in a myriad of ways; to a great majority empowerment suggests women's power to fight men, including their husbands. The very mention of the term empowerment generates strong emotional connotations that construe violent revolutionary action of some sort or the other, organized by the women against the established institutions. The concept of empowerment based on assuaging the oppressions of the women has led to the establishment of the United Nations development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) whose primary role is to promote the participation of women at all levels of development planning and implementation. Olakulehin and Ojo, (2006)

In his clarification for women empowerment through his wondering what women's empowerment is about? Chawla says:

- Making women's contribution to society visible.

- Affirming women's knowledge, skills and experience in other areas of this involvement.

- Creating a social environment that gives women self-esteem and self confidence.

- Providing opportunities for empowering education to girls and women and providing support to them to move into non-traditional roles and take decisions about themselves.

- Enhancing women's participation in political processes at all levels.

- Making facilities and resources available and accessible.

- Enabling women to gain access to and control over means of production, property and other resources and over their own labor, income, bodies and sexuality. (Chawla.2000)[13]

The Place of Education in Women Empowerment

Education is the single best development investment a country can make. It contributes to better health, higher incomes, and increased participation in community life. These social and economic returns have been proved to be particulary high when girls are educated. (Abdel-Aty.2005).

The empowering role of women's education affects not only the lives of women, but also the lives of their children and other dependents such as the aged. Education - especially professional and technical education - is also likely to enhance women's economic independence by equipping them with the skills necessary to take up paid employment opportunity. At the national level, educating women resulted in improved productivity, improve income and economic development.(World Bank,2001a). The process of skills' development in developing countries became through distance /open learning inevitable tool for providing skills. Research evidence also shows that "women with more education or higher qualifications earn more, on an average than women with minimum level education" (Gaba.2007).[14] All over the world, the movement improving the status of women has always emphasized education as the most significant instrument for social change.

Studies emphasized that there is correlation between woman's education and hygienic children level. As, the uneducated women are exposed to malnutrition besides they are having drugs more than educated women as

a result of fact, this leads to infants reduction weights, consequently, the death danger. Educated mother not only bring up healthy children, but also well prepared generation supplied with knowledge and language before joining school, therefore that gives more facilities in their education life.(Dailami.2005)

In addition, woman's education shares in increasing of woman's role participation in man power and increasing the family income as well as education increases their enthusiasm and their ambitions in which related of classical roles inside or outside the house in general, promote their participation in public aspects. On the light of mentioned above, the relation between education and development is a durable and essential relation so, education in various types' form is considered the basic ground because through it, human sources can be developed and invested, therefore the human kind investment can lead to social and economical investment.

An Arabic famous poet called Hafez Ibraheem said, "Mother is school if she has been prepared well that means people will be well prepared.".

In the Palestinian Society education has great importance and forms a basic ground in development, in addition, various economical and social changing. However, to females their education acquires great importance as well as the educational grade which has been achieved by women has formed crucial issue in raising their backward situation.

In general there is admission by many men and women that education for women forms a crucial element in empowerment, as it has given many women a consciousness and comprehension about the relations between female and male. Additionally, it enabled many of them to be aware of their rights and duties realization. Otherwise, woman could through education employ her knowledge in development participation, furthermore, education upon many women constitutes stability and

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quietness for them as a result by educating their future would be more comfortable and safe. This view based on their opinions, at the same time Palestinian woman(many still)considers that marriage and giving birth (especially males)strength and stability factors.

Profound sociological vision for Palestinian woman concern for education makes us not sudden about rising university education output year by year. But we mustn't judge on woman's realization and her social status apart, therefore the woman's status should be judged through her integration in development and her capabilities increasing to be aware of her circumstances, according to be able in taking decisions and making changes. (Tarrah.2006)

Statistics and indicators including demographical information refer to woman's situation and benefit in analyzing other social, cultural and economical structure. On the one hand, it expresses woman's status and gives more accurate view about her roles and situations. On the other hand, it forms an essential base about her graduating progress, moreover clarifying the social base to incorporate the woman in social and economical development process.

In India also education has it's share of concern and there is an early realization for it's importance in social development as the first Prime Minister of India Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "To awake the people, it is women who must be awaken; once she is on the move, the family moves, the village moves and the nation moves" (Gaba.2007)

According to 2001 census data, women account for 48.26% of the 1028.6 million population of India. About 27% of them are 15-29 years old. The literacy rate among women has improved from 7.83% in 1951, to 54.16% in 2001. However, this still remains 228 million women considered to be illiterate (http://www.censusindia.net). It is clear therefore that a large number of women are still outside the existing higher

education system. In India, data shows that women represent about 50% of the adult population, but only 33% of them labor force, however very few women are in a position to influence political thinking or the decision-making process (Pillai, 1995).

Gender

Researchers almost agree that analyzing woman's role is subjected into two ideological views. The first one, is traditional and conservative which confirms on the necessity of woman isolation to be in participation of her society and should be involved in giving birth and house duties. The second one, opens all the possibilities for woman as she is qualified for participation and production, moreover this view tries to improve woman's status and to get rid of her default of progressive environment, in the light of social, economic and civilized roots of her society. (Tarrah.2006).

Gender, expresses the social relationship between woman and man and their duties in the society, the matter which is influenced by customs, traditions and establishments of the society, about the core and the shape of this relation in general, in Arab world and specifically Palestine. Gender conception corporate with sex conception upon many people, so the researcher is committed to explain the differences between these conceptions. Gender is different from sex, hence sex is born with individuals and unchangeable and it has fixed biological functions, while gender is society made and its culture and has changeable social functions, moreover its relations and roles differ according to time and place and social conditions.(Al-Aileh:83)[15]

Abo-Nahleh clarifies that gender is an expression which has been widely used in our society, even it is used as alternative of sex conception. Although it is a conception which refers to a complex process makes male and female social persons to bear their selves meanings

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which are related to expected roles in the society. So, it is a cultural and social conception refers to social, cultural and economical factors which belong to any society that determine the roles, responsibilities and the rights of men and women in the society. (Abu-Nahleh.1996)

Jenkins insists on that in his clarification about gender concept, he says: gender is different social and cultural roles, expectations and constraints placed upon men and women because of their sex. *Sex* identifies the biological difference between men and women whereas *gender* identifies the social relations between men and women. (Jenkins.1995)[16]

Gender conception is the study of superimposed relation between man and woman which is subjected to many social, economical, cultural, political and environmental factors, through their effect on work value in various roles, such as; productive, social, and political and giving birth. Furthermore, it shows power relations among society within sources control and income sources by giving primacy for one gender on other. Therefore, the relation power which the man owns participates in submission of the woman for him if remains unqualified and disable to take her role. (Nadia.2004)[17]

Distance Education can enable women to discover, explore, and expand their hidden potential. Unless women have control over resources, however, education cannot be a guarantee of capitalizing on one's potentials. While education may not improve women's general condition, it does place them at a decisive fulcrum which allows them to make more informed choices for personal development. The specific relationship between distance education and women is murky. However, while women stand as adult learners in their own right, the fact that they are 'women' gives them a specificity that must be thoroughly examined on its own terms. May (1993) for example, asserts that although women generally praise distance education, they also unanimously agree that "it

isn't for everyone" and that it is a significantly different experience for female learners than male learners.

This finding supports that distance education plays a crucial role in achieving the gender parity and increasing literacy rate in general and among women in particular. Thus, to increase life choices among women distance education is a suitable alternative.(Sukati.2006)

Conventional education obstacles:

Conventional education sector still suffer from many obstacles: geographical, political, social, and economical. By geographical part the student resides may form obstacle that where prevent him to reach study place hence, in recent conditions such as blockage and siege otherwise, Palestinian territories have witnessed political upsets and instability, this leads to educational establishment closing because of Israeli occupation. On the social level, after social complications life and appearance of woman's role which has not been restrained in the house. So, it became an essential fact to give new educational methods hence, the educated and uneducated woman join.

Educationally, as a fact there is a durable correlation between economy and education on the one hand it is important to point that education forms essential part of economical development, on the other hand, economical development is a necessity for education development. Therefore, it must have been necessary to search about new education system to surpass above obstacles and remove them, so the open learning was the best solution that fitted this problem; open learning shows itself as a real alternative for conventional learning, particularly in developing countries, since it reduces the expenses. Open learning is considered one of the fastest training and education fields all over the world. Additionally, new inventions in information and technique aspects had enhanced the possibilities of this learning type over services offering

various sectors of people especially women who have been affected negatively by conventional education. ,

Open and Distance Learning

Open and Distance Learning is a source of progress and development for women. Marriage had always been a terminal point for women education. Women rarely leave their homes for further studies because of the risk of loosing their jobs. It was believed among educated men that little education was sufficient for women just to make them literate. It was believed that educated women would not be submissive to their husbands, and hence women education met with resistance in terms of financial and moral support from their husbands. Today, Open and Distance Learning has brought succor to the women education and subsequent empowerment. Women can aspire to reach any level in their education through Open and Distance Learning programs. (Akomolafe. 2006).

Open and distance learning universities have widely started at the beginning seventies in the twentieth century, and still improving until they became effective educational method which is expected to share with main role in development in the 21st century. The open and distance learning universities had offered the best model for gathering between joining high education equality and the ability to pick up great numbers and finding high equality from education, meanwhile those universities have become the most important educational events since the emerge of universities in the middle centuries as a result, this emerge changed the concept of universities. (Kamal.2005)[18]

Generally, Palestinian education system has been suffered all the time by occupation restrictions such as oppression. prejudice and closing the educational establishments, if though schools, institutes and universities. In these conditions, open learning appeared as a solution hence capable
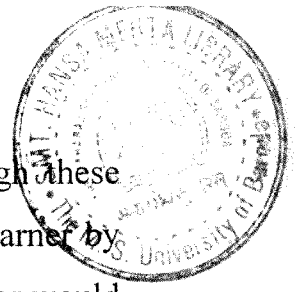
individual can join university near where he/she lives. Through these universities who adopt such system seek to find access to the learner by providing him with educational means and materials, so the learner would not be forced to reach the university. In addition, this type releases the learner from barriers and place restrictions respectively, the learner needn't have worried about attending lectures as well as in Al-Quds Open University in Palestine branches which are spread in every city in Palestine.(Dweakat.2003)[19]

By transferring education into learner's place open and distance learning enables the learner to gather between working and education so, this system based on, self learning, learner independence, computer, educational cases, telephone using and investment of various means such as; printed materials, audio-visual records and television programs. As the open distance learning system by it's nature and means is able to surpass regional boundaries social, geographical and economical obstacles to give free access for every interested individual through achieving the democracy of education concept. (QOU.2004)

Open learning concept:

Open learning concept is considered one of distance learning models which enables learner to learn separately of the university where he/she studies. Learner can choose the appropriate place and time which suit his/her condition, moreover he/she can learn in a fast way which suits his/her abilities and possibility. (Nasrallah.2000)[20]

Otherwise, open learning is an educational policy constitutes its philosophy on individuals right to reach for available educational opportunities, meanwhile it is mass open education for all, as it has flexibility which enables the learner to pick out the way of learning, the time, the place and learning contents, consequently for his/her conditions and needs .(Keelani.2001) [21]

Therefore, it is an educational system which meets natural readiness upon individual through surpassing the obstacles which prevent him/her to keep on learning and deluding of attendance conditions which are essential conditions for conventional education system like age, time devotion for studying, former qualification and financial ability.

Lowis, had defined open learning," the education that enables the learner to control the decisions by her/himself like, content study choosing, learning method, learning place and self learning (when begins and when finishes).[22]

Phil Race determines," open learning means that the student has a freedom in choosing and controlling so, the freedom means; choosing operation, of what he learns ,where as controlling means self controlling, since the student is responsible for his/her learning. By the same taken, open learning is considered the system that can expand opportunities and controlling grade learners, also the use of educational materials which are concentrated about learner and allow learners to take their roles and responsibilities in learning besides helping to keep the needed skills for survival." (Nashwan.1999)[23]

Distance learning concept:

To determine distance learning concept we will show the most important definitions for well known specialists: Abed Al-Jabber says," Distance learning is a democratic system enables equivalent opportunities and skills acquisition aspect over all, this is called learning democracy which includes the three following dimensions:

*- Social dimension: it is a correlation of education democracy and society democracy. Meanwhile, the forms of discrimination should remove those on race, color, social status and gender.

*- Quantitative dimension: distance education systems contain those who are candidate and need to be educated.

*- Qualitative dimension hence, distance learning makes structures, contents and creates flexible and improved curricula to meet the need, of environment and population.(Nasrallah.2000)

Accordingly Al-Quds Open University (QOU) has defined distance learning," As all organized forms of education and learning, as there is no need for meeting between learners and tutors in the same place so that distance learning can give the opportunity for individuals to pursue their learning after loosing the chance to continue their education. As a matter of fact this type is not confined by the restrictions of traditional rules, while it ensures the appropriate flexibility which suits the student circumstances. Otherwise, it needs special preparation in its programs and curricula in order to compensate for interaction absence between learner and tutor. (Shahatah.2003)[24]

Holmburg has defined distance learning, "As a dialogue between the learner and tutor who are not at the same place and this type is available where ever the learner exists, furthermore it has advantage that revolves about the responsibility of the learner in addition to the using of several educational means."[25]

Peters, has defined distance learning,"As a way to spread knowledge and acquisition of skills and attitudes by working condensation in administration and techniques by various type of media so as to produce educational material with high quality to enable learners in their places to get knowledge."(Baker.2000)[26]

Hamadi has also defined distance learning," As suitable for all distance learning establishments, because it determines the following essential factors;

- Separation between learner and teacher.

- The use of technical media to connect learner and teacher in order to apply educational content for studious curriculum.

- The use of two directions for the benefit of learner.

- The possibility of making meetings between teacher and learner to achieve educational and social aims. (Nashwan.1999)

In the light of above definitions the researcher implies that open learning and distance learning are in durable correlation where as it is difficult to distinguish between them

Hence, both of them is flexible and constructed on the same philosophy, that is, learning separated from teacher and educational establishment, not only both of them revolves about learner himself instead of educational establishment, but also both agree to obtain educational opportunity, since all obstacles can be surpassed whether those were, political, financial, social, related to place or time.

Distance and open learning philosophy

Open and distance learning philosophy aims to obtain university educational opportunities for those whom are deprived from high education because of social, economical and geographical conditions or any cause else. Furthermore, it permits for those who had been qualified by degree less than B.A like institutes and those who are concerned to transfer from their universities for any reason, regardless their age, social conditions and educational qualifications besides it equals one third of the expenses in other universities. (Baker.2000)

Also, distance learning permits students and workers to pursue permanent education aspire to promote their cultural level and to develop their skills and information in many spheres. Thereby, it enables tremendous public sectors to obtain knowledge and education. (Ibraheem.2004)

Targets of open and distance learning involve about the following as were referred to by 'Ibraheem"

- Requirement and development plans meeting to suit qualified trained manpower.

- To allow educational university opportunities for all learners who aspire to increase social demand for this learning type.

- To grant learning opportunity for those who missed the high education for reasons which are related to individual or society.

- Supplying education opportunities, training and continuous rehabilitation for employers who are in service.

- To provide all people with cultural programs supplying them with enlightenment and knowledge by using modern means such as television, and satellites through these transmitting educational programs. Therefore, the use is not exclusive on learners merely, but having all the people the matter which is uncovered by conventional education.

- To participate encouraging woman to be educated. As in developing countries woman's education represents real problem, for example in agricultural societies the percentage of illiteracy is rising because there is no encouragement for woman's education. (Ibraheem.2004)[27]

Open and distance learning justifications can be summarized by the following:-

- To give the university education for those who face economical and social obstacles which hinder them to join immediately after secondary grade at that time.

- Open and distance learning enables those who live apart to join university.

- Open and distance learning is considered as an important means of developing society through developing its individuals.

- Open and distance learning gather between job and education.

- Woman's learning is an essential matter in developing society, so open learning suits women by giving them enough time to practice their social role.

The ability of this type to have huge number of students, which exceeds the traditional education ability in this sphere.

- Open and distance learning grants academic programs that give bachelors or less than bachelors for one or two years according to learner desire.

- Open and distance learning obtains progressive education programs and society services that essential for it.

- The flexibility principle that is represented in surpassing all obstacles that may rise because of rules and laws.

- Political uproars and conflicts may not allow to pursuing the organized studying.

- The increasing of traditional educational fees in comparing with open learning.

- Saving efforts and time so as to give more production that leads to adopt more flexible educational system than traditional one.

- Solving psychological problems like drop out and slow learning, hence the studies pointed out that slow learners are shame of their disability to convoy the others which creates loathing for schools and universities, so open learning may solve some of these problems because it reflects fitness for those student (Teashory.2005)

- Open and distance learning under consideration of individual differences among learners.

Open and distance learning (ODL) can provide basic education, skills training and lifelong learning. Appropriate ODL materials are especially important for women who live in countries where they are seen principally as household wives, and where their social and cultural norms make attending face-to-face classes difficult. ODL can provide such women, their partners and their children with the key to the world of learning. Producers of ODL materials must ensure that this key works for

both sexes. For example, a 2001 publication of case studies compiled by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) found that in India, distance education (DE) is the preferred option for women. DE is cost-effective in India as a learner pays only a third of the total fees of a conventional institution. As no classroom attendance is required, there is no need for the woman learner to dislocate herself; because of the degree of flexibility in course completion, the learner can adjust her study timetable within her schedule of household responsibilities. (Jenkins.1995)

Al-Quds Open University (QOU)

QOU is a national institution for higher education located in Palestine. It enjoys an independent status in academic, financial and administrative affairs. The university attempts to provide educational services for interested students through adopting Distance Learning, a mode of University Education adopted by other Distance Education Universities. **QOU** has established its first branch in Al-Quds al-Sharif (Jerusalem) and is taking steps to open other branches and centers in other Arab countries and friendly states by special agreements. **QOU** is a pioneering higher education project in the Arab World arising from the principle of democratizing higher education; providing equal opportunities of higher education and training for all. **QOU** is unique in adopting an unparalleled flexibility in admission policies, time, and place of study, and wide range of options available to students. For this reason the University has the ability to serve the needs of quite unlimited numbers of entrants. (www.portal.qou.edu).

The **QOU** project was initiated in 1975 in response to the needs of the Palestinian people for higher education in the present, severe, social, cultural and economic conditions in which they lived under Israeli

occupation or in the diasporas. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), approached UNESCO to prepare a feasibility study for the University project in cooperation with the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development (AFESD). By 1980 the study was completed and the UNESCO General Conference passed a resolution calling member states to cooperate in implementing the project. In 1981 the Palestine National Council (PNC) approved the project of the University but, to various circumstances, the project did not materialize until 1985, the date of QOU inauguration, when it started operating from its temporary HQ in Amman. In the second half of 1990, **QOU** started providing its services to Palestinian students in the Occupied Territories through first-established branch in Al-Quds al-Sharif (Jerusalem), with the intention of extending future activities to Palestinians in the diasporas and later to students from other Arab countries.

E mission of Al-Quds Open University over the period 2005-2010 can be summarized in the following points:

- Commitment to carrying out the philosophy, principles and methods of open education and distance learning according to the latest cognitive and technological developments.

- Maintaining the University's academic, financial and administrative independence.

- Keeping freedom of thought and expression while avoiding ideological or political conflicts.

- Providing university educational services to the Palestinian people without discrimination in both the West Bank and Gaza Strip, firstly, and to the Arab people, secondly.

- Granting an M.A degree in specializations relevant to the needs of the Palestinian and Arab communities, besides granting B.A degree in the existing programs.

- Offering various continuing education programs, which lead to granting certificates and diplomas of various levels.

- Taking care to make the level of both the academic programs and graduates equal and competitive to the equivalent levels in local and Arab universities.

- Employing a mixture of various instructional media (printed, visual, audio, computerized and electronic) to support distance learners.

- Seeking to convert Al-Quds Open University into a virtual university.

- Commitment to carrying out the principle of learner-centered education.

- Seeking to implement the principle of total quality at the University and providing the necessary qualified cadres, funds and training.

- Encouraging research and studies in particular, as well as creative production in general.

- Developing the professional capabilities of the academic supervisors so they can perform their duties at a high quality level.

- Employing qualified and trained human cadres alongside with applying the most up-to-date techniques of information and communication technology.

- Increasing cooperation and relationship with educational, social and economic organizations in Palestine as well as in Arab and foreign countries.

- Continuing to develop the contents and the methods of the university textbooks to integrate distance learning objectives.

- Increase interest in the scientific applications stated in the academic programs, such as Education, Social Development, etc

The ideas of steadfastness and struggle have been taken from the historical leadership of the people of Palestine. Every Palestinian is now

sure that the University always remains a source of knowledge to every Palestinian home.

QOU is the first among Palestinian and Arab universities adopting the philosophy of Open Education and Distance Learning, keeping abreast of technological and cognitive advances at the global level.

Al-Quds Open University was founded on the land of Palestine at the beginning of 1991. Despite all the difficulties and challenges ahead for the Palestinian people, the university was able to accomplish many tasks and objectives, and continues its efforts to upgrade the academic level and accomplish its mission towards the community.

Since its establishment, and taking into account the flexibility in its educational system, as well as the quality and novelty, the university attracts students to reach over 60 thousand students have been distributed over twenty-two educational centers scattered throughout the country. This is in addition to the tireless efforts of the University to expand the educational services outside the country. It has two educational centers in Saudi Arabia, Emirates and there is an intention to establish other centers abroad.

With regard to Graph (1.1) it is noticed that open learning in Palestine has attracted more women than men as a noticeable example women's percentage was 39% in 1999while men's was 61%, but now women's percentage is 60% whereas men's 40%.

Graph (1.1) Percentage Female and Male students in QOU
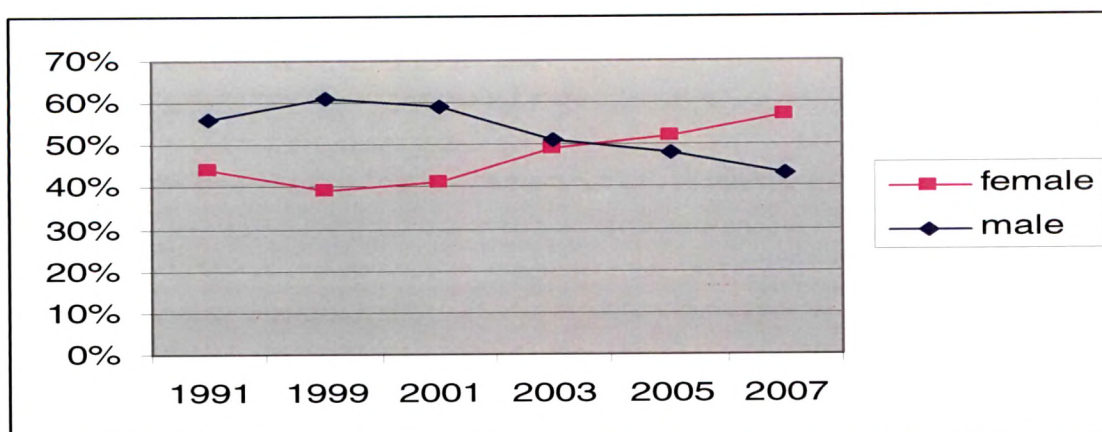
The aim of this university through adopting the philosophy of Open Education and Distance Learning is delivering science and knowledge to all segments of society. This philosophy has embarked university doors to students from employees, workers, farmers, housewives, and fresh secondary education graduates to join the university. In addition to that; the university provides a number of scientific and specialized training facilities that contribute to the promotion of technological skills and knowledge proceeds of scholars and the community in order to build the Palestinian community, and enable it to building national institutions on the basis of competence and merit; the position that qualifies the Palestinian human being for the embodiment and realization of his dream of freedom, independence and justice.

Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU):

IGNOU is the largest Open University and fifth largest University in the World. It played a vital role in the establishment of Distance Education Council (DEC) which is responsible for setting up standards in Distance Education in India.

IGNOU has a strong network of over 961 Study Centers spread across India. (Data as on May 18, 2005)

The Indira Gandhi National Open University, aspirations of about 1.5 million students in India and 35 countries abroad through 11 Schools of Studies and elaborate network of 58 regional centres, seven sub- regional centres , 1400 study centres, and 41 overseas centres. The University is making all efforts to take higher education to the doorsteps of the hitherto unreached. As of now, about 10% of all students enrolled in higher education in the country are enrolled with IGNOU. Apart from teaching and research, extension and training form the mainstay of its academic activities. It also acts as a national resource centre; and more importantly, functions as an apex body to promote and maintain standards of distance education. The University has its presence in 35 countries. The Commonwealth of Learning has recognised it as one of its centres of excellence.

The vision statement of the university reads as:

In order to fulfil the vision of democratising higher education and providing access to all segments of people, the university:

- imparts education and knowledge through various flexible means suited to the open and distance education mode, including information and communication technologies;

- provides higher education and training to large sections of population, Particularly the disadvantaged segments of the society

- promotes national integration and the integrated development of human personality;

- encourages, co-ordinates and assists open universities and distance learning systems to improve standards in subsystems.(www.ignou.gc.in).

Graph (1.2) shows percentages of male and female students in IGNOU during ten years
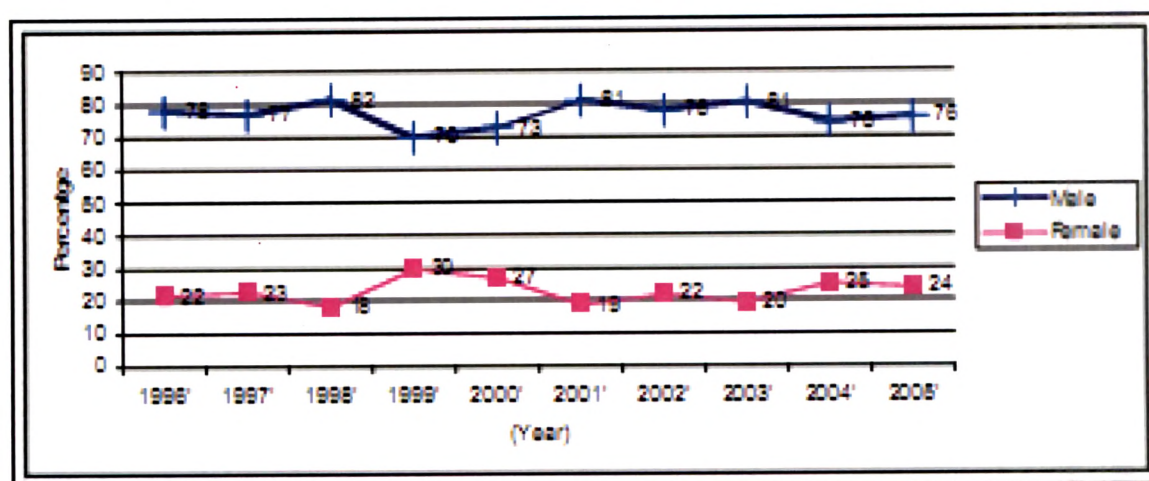

Figure 1 : Percentages of male students and female students in IGNOU (IGNOU, 2006)

The percentage of female learners was 20% in all IGNOU courses in 2002-3 (Graph 1.2). However, nationwide in 2002-3, the percentage of female learners was about 42% in distance education (at all distance teaching institutions including IGNOU), compared to 40% in traditional face-to-face education (DEC, 2004).(Gaba.2007).

By looking at the above figures related to learners joined in Palestine QOU and India IGNOU in spite of the targets, philosophy similarity in both QOU and IGNOU hence it is noticed on the one hand, there are differences in female percentage to males' one as the following; in IGNOU females' percentage is between 15% - 24% , whereas in QOU females' percentage is between39% - 60%.

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Statement of the Study:

The increasing role of Open Learning Program in Palestine (Al-Quds Open University) which has led to attracting big numbers of students that has reached nearly the same number of students in other conventional universities together and in spite of modernity of open learning program (Al-Quds Open University). Even the idea of open learning has started at the beginning of nineties, number of students who joined this sort of learning are still increasing, especially women. Statistics refers to the percentage of 60 per cent students who joined were women, this made conventional learning helpless compared to Open Learning. To compare between Al-Quds Open University in Palestine and Indira Gandhi National Open University in India the statement of study is prsented in the following questions :-

1- What is the role of open learning program in Palestine (Al-Quds Open University) in the development of Palestinian women?

2- What is the role of open learning program in India (Indira Gandhi National Open University) in the development of Indian women?

3- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women due to country variable (Palestine and India)?

4- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women in Palestine and India due to age variable?

5- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women in Palestine and India due to marital status variable?

6- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women in Palestine and India due to place residence variable?

7- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women in Palestine and India due to education (graduated or student) variable?

8- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women in Palestine and India due to specialization variable?

9- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women in Palestine and India due to family size variable?

10- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women in Palestine and India due to family structure variable?

11- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women in Palestine and India due to occupation variable?

12- Are there significant differences in the role of Open Learning Program in the development of women in Palestine and India due to salary variable?

Significance of the Study:

The significance of the study comes from the significance of Open Learning Program, which gives the opportunities for women from Palestinian and Indian communities to join higher education who were not able to join ordinary conventional learning, especially, the women sector which are forgotten when the matter is related to the human development. The interest in women means interest in family because the woman is considered as the essential base which the family involves

around and derives its strength from. This adds another new important element to the present study, furthermore, this study focuses on socio-development and empowerment of women and consequently their societies.

Objectives of the Study:

1- This study aims to know the role of Open Learning Program in Palestine (Al-Quds Open University)and India (Indira Gandhi National Open University) in developing Palestinian and Indian women.

2- Arrangement of study aspects according to its importance and its relationships according to the role of Open Learning Program in developing Palestinian and Indian women.

3- Checking the effect of variables such as the: country, age, marital status, place of residence, education (graduated / student), specialization, family size, family structure, occupation, salary variable on the role of open learning program in developing Palestinian and Indian women .

4- This study represents framework for the researchers and policy makers who are standing at this sort of learning to use the results that the research achieves and recommendations.

Hypotheses of the Study:

1- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing women due to country variable (Palestine-India).

2- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Palestinian women due to age variable.

3- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Indian women due to age variable

4- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Palestinian women due to marital status variable.

5- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Indian women due to marital status variable

6- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Palestinian women due to place of residence variable.

7- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Indian women due to place of residence variable.

8- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Palestinian women due to education (graduated or student) variable.

9- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Indian women due to education (graduated or student) variable.

10- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Palestinian women due to specialization variable.

11- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Indian women due to specialization variable.

12- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Palestinian women due to family size variable.

13- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Indian women due to family size variable.

14- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Palestinian women due to family structure (joint/nuclear) variable.

15- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Indian women due to family structure variable.

16- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Palestinian women due to occupation variable.

17- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Indian women due to occupation variable.

18- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Palestinian women due to salary variable.

19- There are no significant differences of the role of open learning in developing Indian women due to salary variable.

Definition of Terms:

1- Open learning: Open learning concept is considered one of distance learning models which enables learner to learn separately of the university where he/she studies. Learner can choose the appropriate place and time which suit his/her condition, moreover he can learn in a fast way which suits his/her abilities and possibility. (Nasrallah.2000)

2- Social Development: According to Social and Economic Administration Affairs' Report of the U.N it is pedagogical planning processes which involve procedures to develop social trends for people to encourage them accept new ideas, acquire useful knowledge and practical skills either for individuals or groups. All these form basic dimensions in order to reach self development.

3- Gender; The different social and cultural roles, expectations and constraints placed upon men and women because of their sex. *Sex* identifies the biological difference between men and women whereas *gender* identifies the social relations between men and women. (Jenkins, J. 1995).

4- Empowerment; Empowerment is the process and the result of the process whereby the powerless or less powerful members of the society gain greater access and control over material and knowledge, resources, challenges and ideologies of discrimination and subordination and transform the institutions and structures through which unequal access and control over resources is sustained and perpetuated. (Olakulehin.2006) p:1

Scheme of the Study (Chapter-wise):

The proposed study is going to be divided into the following chapters:

Chapter One: :

Introduction.

Chapter Two :

Theoretical Framework and Review of Related Literature.

Chapter Three;

Socio-Cultural Background of Women in India and Palestine.

Chapter four

Research Methodology.

Chapter Five ;

Analysis of Data.

Chapter Six;

Case Studies.

Chapter Seven;

- Conclusions, Findings, Suggestions & Limitations.

Delimitations of Universe of the Study

No research work is complete in all respects. Some limitations are always found in almost all research works. Some of the limitations of this study is as following:

1. The research study is mainly concentrating on Palestinian women who are studying or graduated from Al-Quds Open University in Palestine – Jenin - district and Indian women who are studying or graduated from Indira Gandhi National Open University in India – Baroda- district.

2. Since the universe of the study is Jenin district in Palestine and Baroda district in India, the results based upon the data collections will be useful to explain the role of open learning program in socio-development of women in the particular areas rather than women from the whole region of these countries.

3. This study is based on sample of 200 women out of which 100 women from India and 100 from Palestine. This study also involves 16 case studies out of which eight case studies from Al-Quds Open University in Palestine –Jenin-and other eight case studies from Indira Gandhi National Open University in India – Baroda.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, there seems that there are many advantages of the distance learning system. The foregoing shows that the functional implications and advantages of the scheme cover a broad spectrum of society such that everyone and anyone can benefit at no great cost. While the focus of this work is primarily the women, the distance learning system holds great advantages for the entire society, almost anyone can benefit from this unique system of education. The system however holds special implication for the women, especially in a developing society such as Palestine. Working women as well as women and girls resident in the sub-rural societies could benefit from this distance learning. Another essential part of the study is that it would aspire to increase the higher education level in Palestine generally and the women particularly. Through, success which opens learning has been achieved in attracting and enabling women to pursue their learning that's exactly which motivates female in all stages to have their academic success, so women are safe to pursue their learning while this possibility was not available in conventional education.

In the light of this evidence, the female percentage in QOU is higher than its counterpart in IGNOU on the other hand, another difference is the changing in female percentage meanwhile, in QOU it rises up whereas in IGNOU it is stable so, this may add exceptional significance for the open learning role in Palestine especially in raising women's learning.

It is also worthwhile to shed some light on the distance learning systems in Palestine and India in the following aspects:

In India, distance education has passed through three stages:

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- Correspondence education phase.
- Open and Distance Education phase.
- Online education phase.

The period 1962 to early 1980s was the correspondence education phase. The 1970s saw a spurt in the growth of correspondence education. The first open university was established in 1982. The 1980s and 1990s was a period of spread of open university phase, when several open universities, were established. Presently there are many open universities in India, (see appendix) such as Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) in 1985. The latter part of the 1990s witnessed the beginning of the virtual education phase when online courses were introduced by educational institutions. (Srivastava, M, 2002).

While in Palestine distance learning passed into two stages:
- Open and Distance Education phase.
- Online education phase.

In India there are four types of institutions offering programs through distance mode: National open university, state open universities, directorates of distance education functioning under conventional universities and private professional institutes.

In Palestine there is only one national open university (Al-Quds Open University) and there are no other institutions which offer this form of education. The growth and development of DE has not been uniformed throughout India. The Southern Region accounted for 47.1%, Northern Region 35.4%, Central and Western Regions 16.4% and Eastern Region 2.9% of the total students enrolled in DE in 1999-2000.

Distance learning in India offers variety of specializations that bestow students many choices to study and grants Diploma, BA,MA and PhD degrees while there are only five specializations in distance learning in Palestine and grants Diploma in education and BA degree.

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