

# IGNOU in Enhancing Higher Education for Women in Sikkim

**Genevive Syangbo\*, Karma Samten Bhutia\*\***

\*Asst. Professor  
State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT)  
Gangtok, Sikkim

\*\*Asst. Professor  
Govt. Arts College Mangshila, North Sikkim

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## Abstract

*Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) established by an Act of Parliament in 1985 is one of the largest university in the world operating with the core objective of promoting opportunities for higher education and achieving its vision 'reaching the unreached'. Analysing the role of IGNOU in the advancement and development of higher education through its outstretched academic and professional programmes, the University confers to provide education to the people, more particularly the women and the marginalised sections of the society.*

*The Annual report of IGNOU (2015-16) highlights that the strength of female students is higher than 50%. On the basis of gender, the present enrolment profile of students shows that out of 4.56 lakh enrolled students in 2015-16, 2.07 lakh were female learners.*

*The present study thus, enables us to understand the role of IGNOU in augmenting higher education in general and particularly women in Sikkim. The available data on the enrolment of learners in IGNOU in the state of Sikkim over past five years reveal that enrolment of women in higher education has increased from 55% in January, 2012 to 64% in January, 2017. Evaluation studies also elicit that female learners in Sikkim have highest pass percentage as compared to male learners. Sikkim, where educational development started only in early nineteenth century has less opportunity for higher education aspirants. IGNOU has been one of the leading centers for providing higher education a platform, especially for women in Sikkim. The paper tries to understand higher education system in Sikkim and the contributions made by IGNOU in promoting higher education for women in the state.*

**Key words: IGNOU, Role, Sikkim, Higher, Education, Women.**

## Introduction

The development of higher education in Sikkim has been a major concern since its merger in 1975. Records show that by 1975 only few institutions like Namgyal Institute of Tibetology (1957), Sikkim Institute of Higher Nyingma Studies (1963), and Sir Thudob Namgyal College (1972) existed (Dewan, 2012). Within the period of twenty years of statehood the state could establish only few higher educational institutions. However, with the contribution of private investors many colleges and universities sprout in Sikkim for providing higher education. The growth of higher educational institutes became more visible after 1990's. It shows that the development of higher education in Sikkim laid its foundation quite late as compared to other Indian States.

Despite the fact that colleges, technical training institutions, and universities are showing an upward trend in providing higher education in Sikkim, yet these could hardly accommodate all those who have desire for tertiary level education.

Barring these higher educational institutes, higher education learners in the state also has access to Open Distance Universities like IGNOU. Since there is a great demand for more access to higher education, the IGNOU regional center in the state, through its ODL mode has been serving the learners, especially belonging to low income families and learners aspiring to enhance their educational degrees. IGNOU with its different academic and certificate courses have been able to provide platform to acquire the

basics of higher education to the needy aspirants. Among the group, the maximum aspiring learners are women. In Sikkim, IGNOU has been playing an important part by enabling learners, particularly women for pursuing higher education in various courses offered by the university.

IGNOU, the largest Open University ensures access to higher education with the following primary objectives like -:

- to advance and disseminate learning and knowledge by a diversity of means, including the use of communication technology,
  - to provide opportunities for higher education to a large segment of the population,
  - to promote the educational well-being of the community generally, and
  - to encourage the Open University and distance education systems in the educational system of the country.
- (IGNOU, Annual Report, 2015-16).

In 2015-16, the University recorded the growth of 29.82 lakh enrolment. Of the total fresh enrolment in 2015-16, women constituted 45.5%, STs with 8.8%, SCs with 10.0% and OBC was 20.8%. IGNOU disseminates its major academic programmes through 21 Schools of Studies, 67 Regional Centres and 3,089 Learner Support Centres (LSCs) across the world (IGNOU, Annual Report, 2015-16).

As per records women are the most benefiting section of the larger group. Indira Gandhi National Open University has acted as the education (higher education) provider to women. On the basis of gender, the enrolment profile of students in 2015-16 shows that out of 4.56 lakh enrolled students 2.07 lakh students represented females. Increased female student enrolment is seen in the courses like- School of Education, Gender and Development Studies, Humanities, Health Sciences, Continuing Education, Vocational Education and Training, Social Work and Translation Studies and Training. The highest enrolment of female students is recorded in School of Gender and Development Studies with 79.3% followed by 67.4% in the School of Humanities. Hence, IGNOU as an academic center has been able to meet the expectation of providing education, especially to learners, particularly women, the marginalised section of the society.

The available statistics in Sikkim show that enrolment of female learners in ODL system is quite high. Various courses offered by IGNOU have attracted large numbers of female learners to pursue higher education through distance mode. In Sikkim, the enrolment of women learners in IGNOU is consistently increasing. The study on the past five years of enrolment profile shows that the women enrolment has increased from 55% in January, 2012 to 64% in January, 2017. There has also been tremendous increase in pass percentage of female learners as compared to male learners. IGNOU has been one of the leading centres in providing higher education, especially for women in a state like Sikkim where educational development began in early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Considering the above factors, IGNOU, in Sikkim is playing a role of 'Life-long Learning Center' as assured by UNESCO.

In this view, the present paper is an attempt to study the role of IGNOU in enhancing higher education to women in Sikkim. For this purpose of study, the paper relies on the data collected from the IGNOU, Regional Center, Gangtok, Sikkim, 2017. The data used includes the list of enrolment of learners in each course from 2012 to 2017 and the convocation list of learners for the year, 2014, 2015 and 2016.

The following section tries to focus on the enrolment of women for various programmes and degree received under IGNOU in past five years (2012-2017).

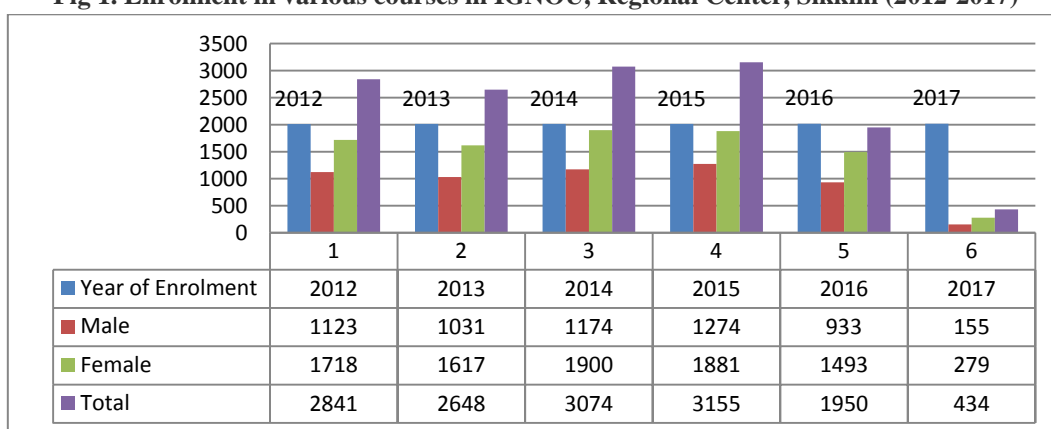
Along with the other higher educational institutions in the state, the enrolment of women in various courses offered by IGNOU has seen a tremendous increase in past five years. Consistency in increase in enrolment of women each year is a noticeable factor. The following table shows the enrolment of learners in various courses in past five years.

**Table 1. Enrolment of learners in IGNOU, Regional Center, Gangtok, Sikkim (2012-2017)**

Sl. No.	Year of Enrolment		Male	Female	Total
1	January	2012	308	378	686
2	July	2012	815	1340	2155
3	January	2013	322	457	779
4	July	2013	709	1160	1869
5	January	2014	532	778	1310
6	July	2014	642	1122	1764
7	January	2015	516	723	1239
8	July	2015	758	1158	1916
9	January	2016	180	296	476
10	July	2016	753	1197	1950
11	January	2017	155	279	434

Source: IGNOU, Regional Centre, Gangtok, Sikkim

**Fig 1. Enrolment in various courses in IGNOU, Regional Center, Sikkim (2012-2017)**



Source: IGNOU, Regional Centre, Gangtok, Sikkim

In gender wise comparison of course completion in 2014, 2015 and 2016, the result analysis shows that highest number of women has completed their higher education courses. As per the IGNOU records the course completed by female learners are greater than the male learners in all three consequent years. The evaluation results also show that the female learners have higher pass percentage than the male learners.

The year wise (2014-2016) and course wise completion data (in figures) for Bachelor Degree Programmes (BDP) and Master Degree and Certificate Courses are presented as follows;

**Bachelor Degree Programmes (BDP) and Certificate courses;**

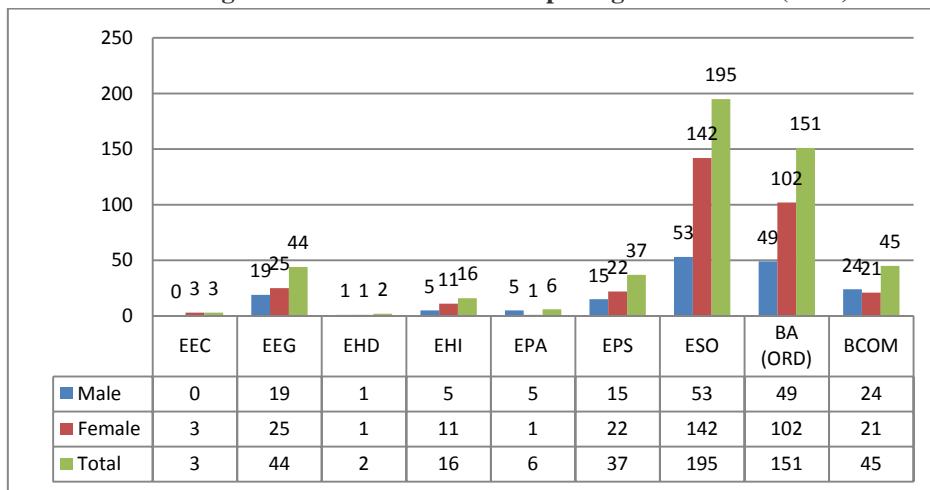
EEC-Elective Economics

EPA-Elective Public Administration

EEG- Elective English

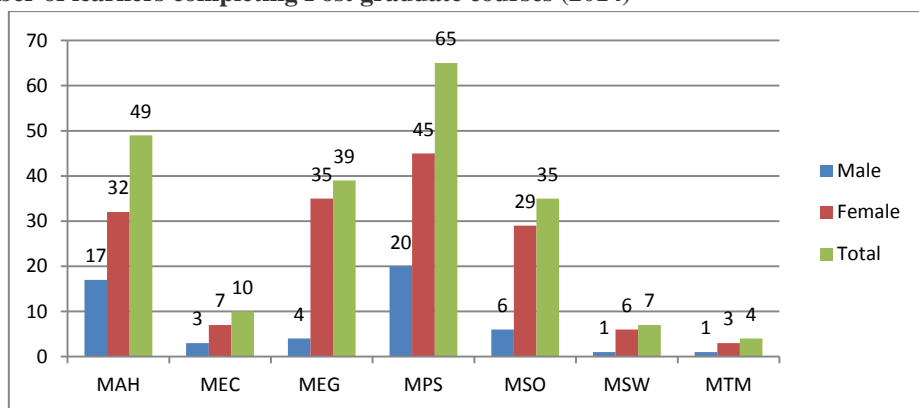
**Master Degree and Certificate Courses:**

**Fig 2. Number of learners completing BDP Course (2014)**



Source: IGNOU, Regional Center, Gangtok, Sikkim, 2017

**Fig 3. Number of learners completing Post graduate courses (2014)**

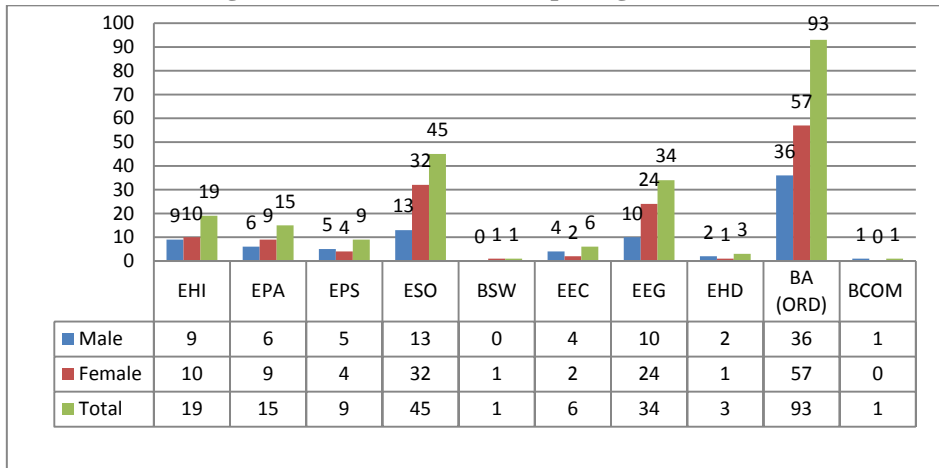


Source: IGNOU, Regional Center, Gangtok, 2017

As depicted in figure 2 and 3, the total number of learners who completed their course (Post Graduate) in 2014 is 209. Out of which 157 are female learners and 52 male learners. The highest number of learners completing their course is in MPS, followed by MAH, MEG, MSO and MEC.

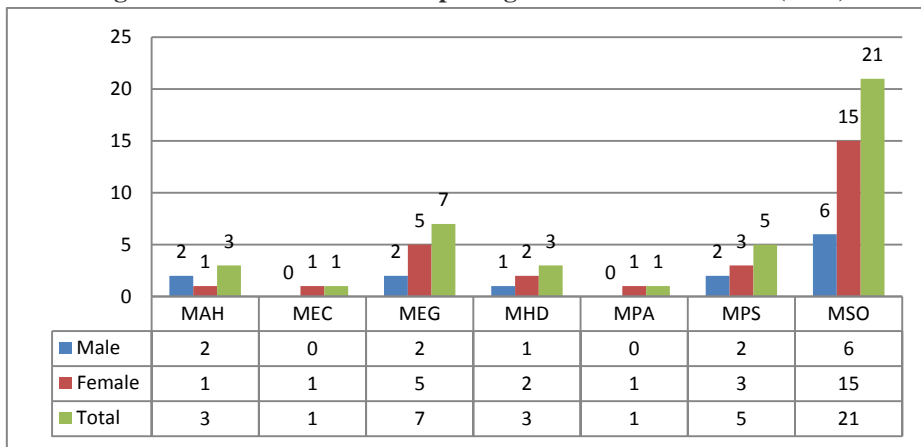
The total number of learners completing BA Courses in 2014 is 499, where 328 are female learners and 171 are male learners.

**Fig.4. Number of learners completing BDP course (2015)**



Source: IGNOU, Regional Centre, Gangtok, Sikkim

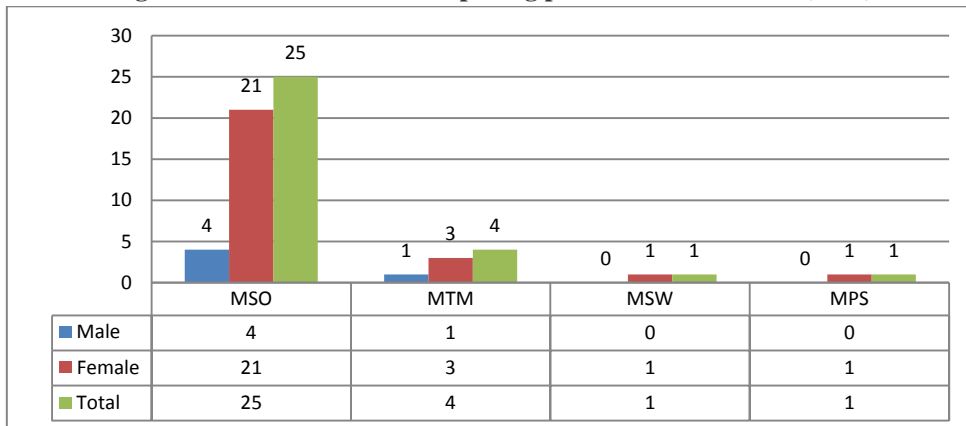
**Fig.5. Number of learners completing Post Graduate course (2015)**



Source: IGNOU, Regional Centre, Gangtok, Sikkim

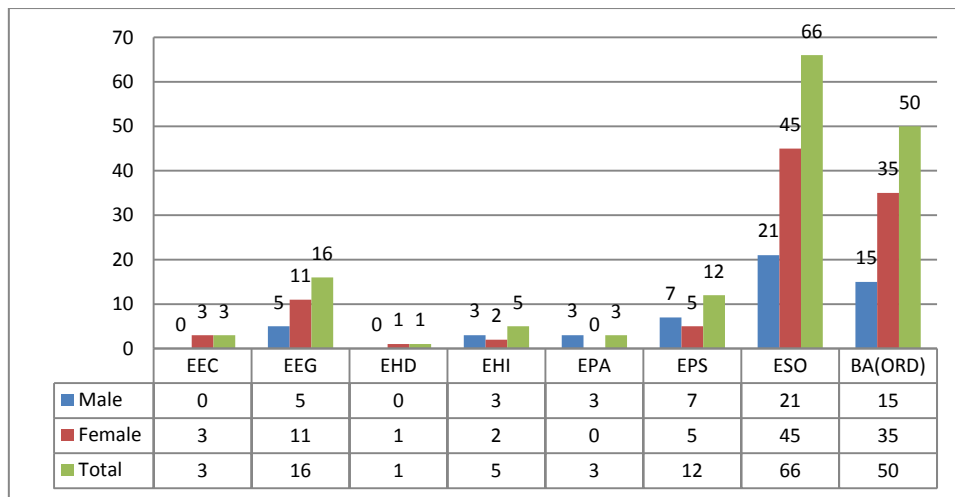
The learners who have completed their BDP courses in 2015 are 226, where 140 are female learners and 86 are male learners. In Post graduate courses also the female learners are on the higher side.

**Fig.6. Number of learners completing post Graduate Course (2016)**



Source: IGNOU, Regional Centre, Gangtok, Sikkim

**Fig.7. Number of learners completing BDP Course (2016)**



Source: IGNOU, Regional Centre, Gangtok, Sikkim

Similarly, analysis of 2016 result of Post graduate courses and BDP Courses elicits that of the total 187 learners, 128 female learners and 59 male learners have completed their courses. It is seen from the study of enrolment and result analysis of learners in five years (2012-2017) that women have been benefiting the most from the ODL system of IGNOU in the state.

IGNOU, since its very inception in December, 2000 in Sikkim has become the center of higher education in the state. With the opening of IGNOU, the aspiring learners for higher education sought entry to the new system of Distance education which enabled the learners to live their dreams of learning and acquiring higher qualifications. Considering the enrolment profile and result data of IGNOU, Regional Centre, Sikkim has been able to meet the principle of 'reaching the unreached'. Above all IGNOU has contributed significantly to the development of higher education in Sikkim.

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## **Author Biography**

### **First Author**

Name: Genevive Syangbo

Qualification: Ph.D

Designation: Assistant Professor

Name of the Institution: State Council for Educational Research and Training, Gangtok, Sikkim

Email id.:syangbog@gmail.com

### **Second Author**

Name: Karma Samten Bhutia

Qualification: Master Degree

Designation: Assistant Professor

Name of the Institution: Government. Arts College Mangshila, North Sikkim

Email id.: dorzapa@gmail.com

### **Corresponding Author**

Name: Genevive Syangbo

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.9.06.2019.p9015>

[www.ijsrp.org](http://www.ijsrp.org)

Qualification: Ph.D

Designation: Assistant Professor

Name of the Institution: State Council of Educational Research and Training, Gangtok, Sikkim

Email id.:syangbog@gmail.com/ syangbog@yahoo.com

Contact No: 9775961825