
A Study on Gender Gap in Higher Education in India

Dr. Preeti Singh
Asst. Prof., Vasanta College for Women, Rajghat,
B.H.U. Varanasi, U. P.

Abstract

Keywords:

Higher Education, Gender gap, Gender Parity Index, Gross Enrollment Ratio, Demographic Dividend.

India's large young population needs to be well educated and skilled to cultivate demographic dividend. Many skill development programmes are being run by the Government for skilling and upskilling people of the country. For educating greater number of youths, there has been an increase in the number of colleges and universities in recent years. But Indian education system particularly higher education still has scope of improvement and there is need for expansion as well as transformation of higher education in India. The area which needs special attention is female access to higher education. Improvement in India's Gender Parity Index from 0.86 in 2010-11 to 1.0 in 2018-19 shows that there has been reduction in gender gap in higher education institutes of India in recent years. Moreover, All India survey on Higher Education (AISHE) conducted by Ministry of Human Resource Development in 2018-19 shows that females have outnumbered males in many disciplines in recent years. However, female participation in professional courses is still lower as compared to academic courses at both UG and PG levels. The paper considers this issue of gender gap in higher education in India. Various steps taken by the Indian Government for strengthening higher education system as well as reducing gender gap at this level have also been discussed in this paper. The Paper also suggests some ways to narrow down the gap and strengthen higher education system.

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Author correspondence:

Dr. Preeti Singh
Flat No. 204, Shanti VimlaVihar Apartment
Rohit Nagar, Nariya, Varanasi, U. P.- 221005

1. Introduction

By developing cognitive skill of individuals and inculcating morals and values in them, education helps in human resource development and thus plays an important role in the

development of any country. Economists consider education as quasi-public goods as it does not only benefit to the individuals who are educated but to the society as a whole. It facilitates social transformation. Social transformation is easier and at faster pace if females are well educated because they play diversified roles in their family. An educated woman not only takes better care of her own health and nutrition but also pays more attention on the education, health and nutrition of her children and thus helps in building up a strong society and nation. Three levels of education i.e. Primary education, Secondary education and Higher education have their own significance and purpose of each level of education varies with each other. Primary and secondary education lays foundation for higher education and higher education increases employability of a person. This implies that higher education system can be strengthened by firming primary as well as secondary education. Higher education disseminates specific knowledge and skills and facilitates development of a country. It produces teachers for the education system. Education empowers women by making them aware about their rights and enables them to fight against any kind of violence to them.

An educated person has more employment opportunities than an uneducated one of same age and with same skills. Further, significance of higher education cannot be undermined for females as it increases their knowledge, improves their quality of life and empowers them by making economically independent. It plays an important role in improving their socio-economic situation and statistically has been associated with better health, lower fertility rate, higher economic growth and better standards of living (Khan, 1993, Khalid, 2008). Despite significant improvement in female education in recent years, their access to higher education is still an area of concern in India. Girls often drop their studies after receiving education up to primary or secondary level and thereafter they are either married or get involved in household responsibilities. In Patriarchal society, women are not expected to be breadwinners in their family. Therefore, their objective of receiving higher education is often to get a better life-partner or dowry free marriage rather than to get employment. Situation is worse in case of women living in rural areas. Females living in rural areas, remote areas and small towns without colleges and universities find it difficult to move towards cities to receive higher education. Apart from financial constraints, safety concerns often become a great obstacle in their education. Even if they manage and receive higher education; then obtaining a well-paid job as return to investment in education is next challenge. Considering these issues, their parents are reluctant to take pain and send them for higher education. Parents do not invest in their daughter's education because they don't expect them to be able to make an economic contribution for the family.

According to human capital theory, education is an investment in the self, so if men earn more from their careers for the same level of education then the human capital model would predict a lower investment in female's education (Khan, 1993).

Gender inequality is not uncommon in India. The extent of gender inequality varies across region, caste, religion and social as well as economic status of a family. Similarly, gender gap in higher education also varies across region, caste, religion and social as well as economic status of a family. It is more prevalent in economically and socially backward classes. Poor families are not able to bear educational expenses for their children particularly if there was a girl child.

2. Objectives

1. To identify extent of gender gap in higher education in India.
2. To find out initiatives taken by Indian Government to reduce gender gap in higher education.

3. To suggest some ways to narrow down gender gap in higher education and to strengthen higher education system in India.

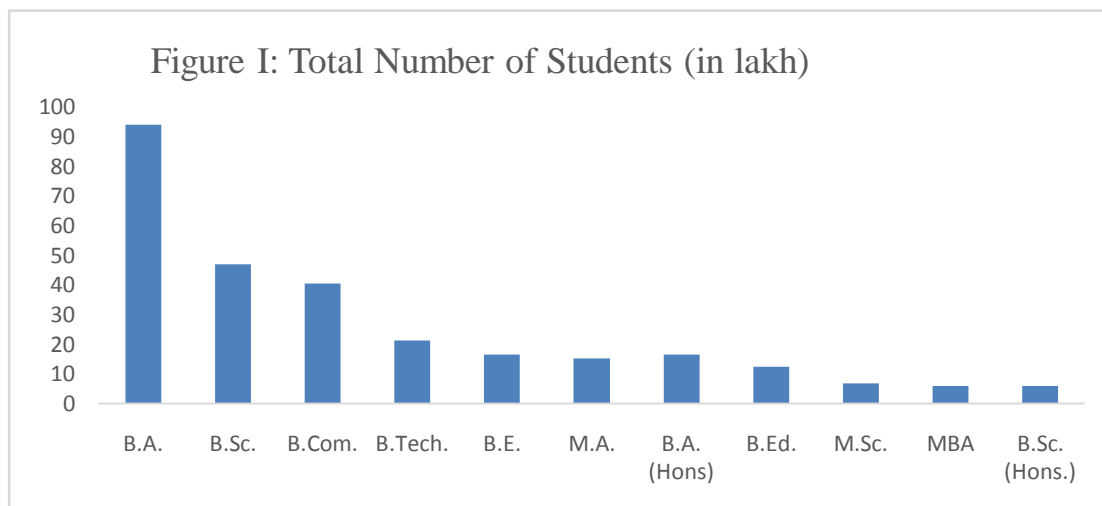
3. Gender Gap in Higher Education in India

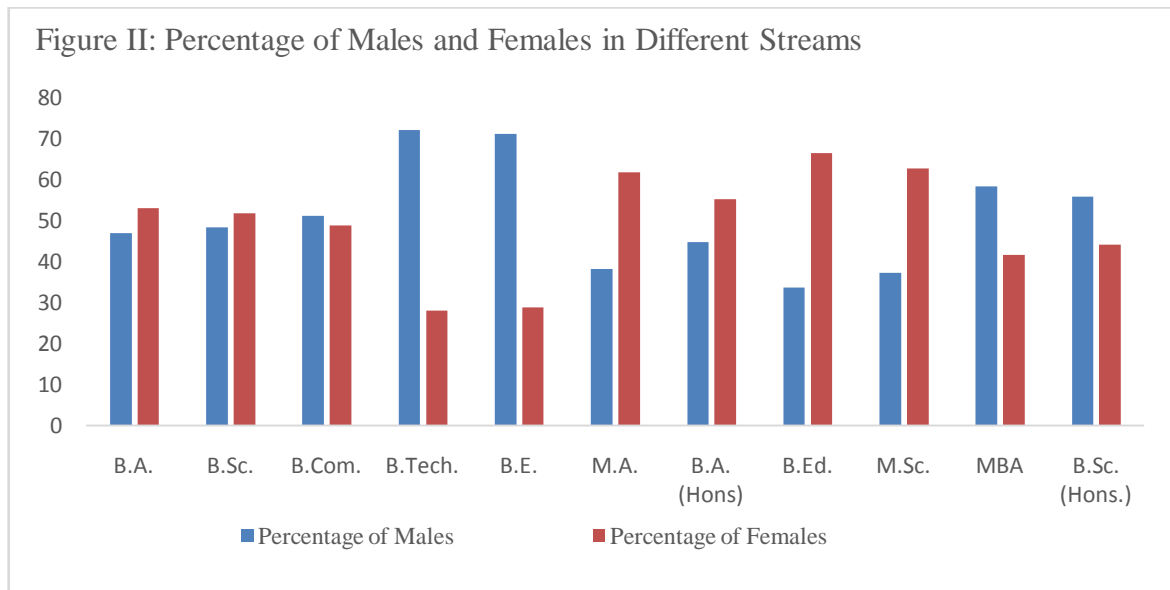
All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Report 2018-19 shows that there has been increase in number of higher education institutions. Presently there are 993 Universities, 39931 Colleges and 10725 Stand Alone Institutions. Sixteen Universities are exclusively for women. The report shows that total number of enrolled students in higher education in India is 37.4 million. Out of which 19.2 million students are male and 18.2 million students are female. This implies that female constitute 48.6 per cent of the total enrolment. The country has 26.3 per cent Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in Higher education with GER for male population 26.3 per cent and for females, it is 26.4 per cent in 2018-19. Data shows that GER in higher education for females has increased at a rate higher than that of males between 2014-15 to 2018-19. Highest number of students are enrolled in Under Graduate Courses. There are 79.8 per cent UG students, 10.8 per cent PG students. Persistence of gender inequality is a cause of concern. Though there has been improvement in total enrollments in higher education at all-India average level; yet there are wide variations in terms of enrollment across different disciplines. As per data given by UGC there were only 14 women per 100 men in higher education in India in 1950-51. Table I shows total number of students along with percentage of males and females in different streams.

Table I: Students Enrolled in Higher Education in India, 2018-19

Name of Course	Total Number of Students (in lakh)	Percentage of Males	Percentage of Females
B. A.	93.94	46.96	53.04
B. Sc.	46.80	48.3	51.7
B.Com.	40.30	51.2	48.8
B.Tech.	21.25	72.0	28.0
B. E.	16.45	71.14	28.86
M. A.	15.12	38.22	61.78
B. A. (Hons)	16.39	44.79	55.21
B. Ed.	12.23	33.61	66.39
M. Sc.	6.79	37.28	62.72
MBA	5.88	58.33	41.67
B.Sc. (Hons.)	5.83	55.90	44.1

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) Report 2018-19





The streams which have higher percentage of females are B.A., B. A. (Hons.), B. Ed., M. A., B.Sc. and M.Sc. (Figure II). Further, number of female students in Medical Science is greater than number of male students as there are 7.25 lakh female students out of total 11.96 lakh total enrolled students. However, female participation is lowest in Agriculture, Engineering, Law and Physical Education sectors. Even in Management stream out of 6.5 lakh enrolled students only 2.45 lakh students are females and rest 4.05 lakh students are males. Similarly, in Law stream out of 3.98 lakh students, 2.64 lakh are males and merely 1.34 lakh are female students. Thus, gender distribution in Higher education is favorable to males as ratio of male is higher than female in most of the level, except M.Phil., Post Graduate and Certificate. At Under Graduate level percentage of female and male enrollment is 49 and 51 respectively and at Ph.D. level it is and 43.82 and 56.18 respectively.

Distance education is often seen as an alternative way to access higher education for students residing in remote areas. But data shows that distribution of students even under distance mode is unfavorable for females. It has been found that share of male students is higher than female at all levels except Post Graduate and Certificate course. Gender Parity index for all categories is 1 indicating participation of females in Higher Education is 100 per 100 males. For Scheduled Casts (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) it is 102 and 92 per 100 males respectively. By inculcating knowledge, skills and competencies required by an occupation, professional education prepares students for a particular occupation or class of occupations and increases their employability. However, participation of females in professional courses is less than their participation in academic courses at both Under Graduate and Post Graduate levels. Moreover, this gap is higher in case of enrolment in professional courses in Private Institutions. Despite limited job opportunities females prefer to join traditional courses rather than professional courses. Another inequality in terms of gender distribution is the number of female teachers per 100 male teachers. There are 73 female teachers per 100 male teachers at the all-India level. Likewise, in SC category there are 57 female teachers per 100 male teacher and in case of ST and OBC, it is 68 and 68 females per 100 male teachers, respectively.

4. Reasons for Gender gap in Higher Education

Less number of females as compared to males in different streams of higher education in India is worrisome and calls for suitable actions. To take appropriate actions, there is need to know the reasons responsible for it. Some of the reasons are as follows:

1. Socio-cultural Attitude

Social attitude towards girls' education is not very conducive in our country. So, families do not make same level of effort to educate their female child which they make for male child. Poor families sometimes sell their land and other valuable assets to educate their male child. But such efforts are rarely made by the families for their female child. Moreover, expensive education of male child is often met at the cost of female child's education in the family. In patriarchal societies men feel dominance over women and think that if women were educated their dominance would be endangered. Gender stereotype thinking deters people to think in a broader perspective and promote female education.

2. Safety Concerns

Not to talk of higher education, girls often drop their studies at primary or secondary level due to safety issues. Increasing cases of sexual harassments, molestation, teasing, acid attacks etc. demotivates parents to send their daughters to college or university for higher studies. The problem is more severe in areas where colleges/universities are situated at very far places. Thus, girls living in small towns and distant villages find it difficult to reach the college/university for higher studies. Besides, poor families are not able to afford heavy conveyance expenses in addition to the course fees when educational institutes are situated at distant places. Lack of female teachers in colleges and universities also gives a feeling of insecurity in girl's parents.

3. Financial Constraint

There has been increase in number of Private Universities/Institutes for providing professional education. These private institutes charge a handsome amount in the form of fees for professional courses. Professional courses are more job oriented as compared to traditional courses therefore boys often opt for such courses. But parents don't want to spend heavy amount of money in their daughter's education. Therefore, excessive amount of fees and other expenses prevent girls to join such courses. Instead of investing in daughter's education, parents prefer to keep this money for their marriage. Though situation has been changed a little bit; yet much effort is needed to reduce gap in professional courses. This is evident from the data given in AISHE 2018-19 Report which shows that participation of females in professional courses is less than their participation in academic courses at both Under Graduate and Post Graduate levels. Moreover, this gap is higher in case of enrolment in professional courses in Private Institutions.

4. Time Constraint

Girls used to perform various household works and therefore they are not able to join regular courses. It is considered as a waste of their time to attend the college/university. Situation is worse in rural areas where they are also involved in agriculture works apart from domestic works. Though well-educated parents are gradually becoming aware about benefits of female education and have started paying attention on their daughter's education; yet number of such parents is still very less. Females get lesser number of years for building up their career and complete their education as compared to their counterpart males. Therefore, they are often forced to choose short duration courses. Most of the parents do not allow their daughters to continue their studies for a long period of time. Tradition of early marriage of girls also hampers their education. They are not able to continue their studies after matrimony due to increased household responsibilities.

5. Lack of Infrastructure

Despite improvement in infrastructure of higher educational institutions in recent years; it often does not meet girls' requirements. Lack of toilet facilities demotivates girls to go to the college and stay for long hours. Same reason is responsible for large number of dropouts of girl students from primary and secondary schools. Though Government through its Swachh Bharat Campaign has instructed schools and colleges for construction of separate toilets for girls; yet many educational institutes still lack working toilets. Girl students often fall sick due to lack of hygiene conditions in their institutes and either they leave their studies or become irregular. However, one laudable achievement in recent years is that many institutes have now installed sanitary pad machines in the campus to facilitate female students. Private institutions are generally equipped with better infrastructure as compared to the government institutions but heavy amount of fees charged by the former discourages girls to join these institutes.

5. Steps taken by Indian Government

The Government of India has formulated various policies and programmes to promote female education. Successive Five-Year Plans considered upliftment of women through education. A National Committee on Education for girls was set up in 1958 and later on National Policy on Education (NPE) was placed in 1968. According to NPE 1968, female education should be promoted not only on grounds of social justice, but also because it accelerates social transformation. National Policy on Education, 1986 focused on using education as an agent of basic change in the status of woman. The policy propagated that national education system will play a favorable role in women empowerment. Educational institutions were encouraged to undertake programmes to supplement women's development. Extreme priority was given to remove women's illiteracy and overcome the obstacles which inhibits their access to, and retention in, elementary education. Having seen less participation of women in vocational, technical and professional courses as well as in choosing non-traditional occupations, policy laid special emphasis on them. Pursuance of non-discriminatory policy was proposed to be followed so that gender stereotyping could be eliminated in vocational and professional courses.

Creating conducive environment for females and increasing their access to and retention and success in higher education has always been the agenda of University Grants commission (UGC). To meet the agenda, Gender Sensitisation Unit has been set up within the UGC. All higher educational institutions have been instructed to ensure that their members undergo processes of gender sensitization and all students undertake some course or workshop on it during their period of study. Higher educational institutions (HEIs) are required to conduct various gender sensitization programme in the campuses. To ensure safety and security of girls, UGC has clarified that all HEIs must frame rules and regulations to deal with sexual harassment in their respective institutions. To facilitate women education, special grants have been sanctioned by UGC for construction of Women hostels in the Universities. UGC has taken various other initiatives like Single Girl Child Scheme, Post-Doctoral Fellowship for Women etc. to promote women education.

Having seen low enrolment ratio of female students in premier engineering colleges of the country, Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has launched a scheme named "Udaan". Under this scheme free online resources are provided to girl students of Class XI and Class XII for preparation of admission test for the premier engineering colleges in the country. Government of India and National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has jointly launched E-Pathshala portal; which provides educational resources for teachers, students, researchers etc. in Hindi, English and Urdu languages. The students can get access to all study materials available on this portal. To create awareness among the people regarding significance of girls' education, Government of India has recently

made campaign 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao'. This slogan also raises concern over declining child sex ratio in the country. Being at the top of the pyramid in three levels of education, access to higher education can be ensured only after successful completion of two lower pillars i.e. primary and secondary education. Government of India launched Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) for universalisation of Elementary Education with special emphasis on girl education in India. Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme was also launched to offer primary level education to girls particularly disadvantaged girls in rural areas. Draft National Education Policy 2019 proposes to increase the number of women in positions of leadership in schools and provision of creche facilities to enable the hiring and retention of women in education.

6. Recommendations

Despite several efforts made by the Government to promote women education, gender gap in higher education still persists in India. This implies that success on this front can only be achieved by active participation of the whole society. Thus, there is need to change attitude of people towards women education. People should be made aware about the benefits of educating women. To increase gross enrolment ratio in higher education, many areas need to be focused upon. Safety measures should be strengthened so that females could reach higher educational institutions situated at distant places without any fear. Parents are often more comfortable in sending their daughters in women colleges/universities. Presently there are only sixteen women universities. More number of women colleges and universities should be opened and that too in rural and backward areas. Infrastructure of female colleges and universities should be maintained according to girls' requirements. Institutes must provide separate toilets and a common room for girls. Installation of sanitary pad machines should be made mandatory in all educational institutes. Financial constraints of female students could be dealt with provision of fee concessions and different scholarships to them. Special fee concession should be given for studying those courses which girls generally don't choose. Girls' quota may be fixed to increase their enrollment in those streams where percentage of female enrollment is very less. However, merit in any way should not be compromised. For example, as per MHRD direction 14 per cent quota has been fixed for girls in IITs to reduce the existing gender gap in premier engineering colleges since 2018. To increase female access to higher education, Government has already move towards digitalization of higher education. Obstacles which come in the way of digitalization of higher education should be removed. Government should ensure that no discrimination is made against women in labour market in terms of wages, working hours, quality of work etc. because such discrimination demotivates them to receive higher education.

7. Conclusion

Education is required by all of us for our all-round development. It advances manpower for diverse levels of the economy and helps in the economic development of a country. India cannot progress if half of its population were remained uneducated. There has been enormous expansion of higher education in post-independence period in India. Due to initiatives taken by the government our dreams have come true. Gender gap in higher education has been narrowed down that is reflected by improvement in gender parity index. However, there is still scope of improvement. Though Indian Government has always been keen to formulate policies to promote female education and improve our education system; yet implementation part often lags behind. Moreover, cooperation of people is needed to promote female education. To conclude, proper policy formulation and its effective implementation will bridge the gap and strengthen our higher education system.

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