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UNVEILING GENDER DISPARITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO JAIPUR, RAJASTHAN

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Abstract: This research paper examines gender disparities in higher education, with a focus on enrollment, academic achievement, and leadership roles in Rajasthan, India. The purpose of the study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of gender inequality within the higher education landscape and to propose evidence-based interventions to promote inclusivity and equity. Employing a multidisciplinary framework, the study utilizes a combination of quantitative data analysis and qualitative research methods to elucidate the root causes of gender disparities and their implications. Findings reveal persistent gender gaps in enrollment rates, academic achievement, and leadership representation, influenced by socio- cultural norms, economic disparities, and institutional practices. Key recommendations include implementing gender-sensitive policies, enhancing access to resources and mentorship opportunities, and fostering a supportive academic environment.

Keywords: Gender inequality, higher education, enrollment, academic achievement, leadership roles.

INTRODUCTION

Gender inequality in higher education is a multifaceted issue that transcends mere enrollment statistics, encompassing disparities in academic achievement, leadership opportunities, and societal perceptions. Despite advancements in educational access and gender equality efforts, persistent gaps continue to exist, posing challenges to the realization of inclusive and equitable higher education systems. In this research paper, we undertake a comprehensive exploration of gender disparities in higher education, with a particular emphasis on the state of Rajasthan, India.

Enrollment serves as the foundational stage in the higher education journey, reflecting individuals' aspirations, societal expectations, and systemic barriers. As noted by UNESCO (2019) and Gupta, Das, & Chaudhary (2020), gender disparities in enrollment rates persist globally, with women often facing structural obstacles such as limited access to education, economic constraints, and cultural norms that prioritize male education. In the context of Rajasthan, where traditional gender roles and socio-economic disparities intersect, understanding enrollment patterns offers valuable insights into the underlying dynamics of gender inequality in higher education.

Furthermore, the examination of enrollment extends beyond numerical figures to encompass the quality of educational experiences and opportunities available to individuals post-entry. Research by Sen & Bhattacharya (2021) underscores the importance of analyzing not only enrollment rates but also retention, completion, and academic performance metrics, which often reveal gendered patterns of achievement and progression. In Rajasthan, where societal expectations regarding gender roles and educational outcomes intersect with economic realities and institutional practices, investigating the journey "beyond entry" is crucial for understanding the nuanced manifestations of gender inequality in higher education.

Moreover, disparities persist beyond enrollment, impacting academic achievement and leadership opportunities within higher education institutions. Studies by Sharma, Gupta, & Singh (2018) and Jones & Smith (2019) highlight the prevalence of gender biases in evaluation, limited access to resources and mentorship, and systemic barriers to career advancement that hinder women's academic success and representation in leadership roles.

Review of Literature

Gender Disparities in Enrollment Trends:

The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2019) provides a comprehensive analysis of gender disparities in enrollment trends worldwide. Drawing on extensive data and research, the report highlights persistent gaps in enrollment rates between males and females across different regions. It offers valuable insights into the scale and scope of gender inequality in access to higher education, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address these disparities.

Gender gaps persist in higher education enrollment in India, with females often underrepresented (Biswal & Singh, 2019). Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and parental education, significantly influence female enrollment rates (Bhatia & Deepti, 2018). Cultural norms and societal expectations also contribute to disparities in enrollment, particularly in regions like Rajasthan (Deshpande, 2017).

Socio-Cultural Factors Influencing Enrollment Patterns:

Smith, Johnson, and Brown (2020) explore the socio-cultural factors influencing enrollment patterns in higher education, with a focus on gender disparities. Their research investigates regional variations in enrollment trends, particularly in the context of India. By analyzing data and trends, the study underscores the role of socio-cultural norms and expectations in shaping individuals' decisions to pursue higher education, providing valuable insights into the complex interplay between culture and education.

Intersectionality and Enrollment Disparities:

Collins and Bilge (2016) introduce the concept of intersectionality as a framework for understanding enrollment disparities. Their research highlights the intersecting dimensions of gender, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status in shaping individuals' experiences and access to higher education, offering a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved.

Intersectional factors, such as caste and ethnicity, intersect with gender to compound disparities in higher education. Research indicates that marginalized groups, including Dalit and tribalwomen, face compounded barriers to accessing and completing higher education in Rajasthan (Kumar & Saxena, 2016).

Academic Performance and Gender Disparities:

Female students often face challenges in academic performance due to various factors, including limited support systems and societal expectations (Sharma & Sharma, 2019). Research suggests that despite enrollment, girls may struggle to excel academically, impacting their overall educational experience and future opportunities.

Barriers to Female Empowerment:

Gender disparities in higher education perpetuate broader barriers to female empowerment, including limited access to employment and leadership roles (Singh & Singh, 2020). Structural barriers, such as discriminatory hiring practices and lack of representation in leadership positions, hinder women's economic and social advancement post-education.

Role of Government Policies:

Government policies and initiatives play a significant role in addressing gender disparities in education. Deshpande (2017) highlights the importance of targeted interventions, such as scholarships and awareness programs, in promoting female enrollment and retention in higher education institutions.

Community and Family Support:

Community and family support systems influence female participation in higher education. Studies suggest that supportive family environments and community networks can mitigate some of the barriers faced by girls in accessing education (Jain & Jain, 2020). Encouraging community involvement and parental support is essential for fostering gender-inclusive educational environments.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the intricate dynamics of gender disparities in highereducation, with a specific focus on enrollment patterns, academic achievement, and leadership representation in Rajasthan, India. Through a comprehensive analysis of socio-cultural norms, economic constraints, and institutional practices, the study sought to shed light on the nuanced manifestations of gender disparities and their implications for individuals and society at large. Ultimately, the research endeavored to contribute to scholarly discourse aimed at fostering amore inclusive and equitable higher education environment in Rajasthan and beyond.

Objectives of the Study

- **To Assess Gender Disparity in Higher Education Enrollment in India:** This objective aims to investigate the extent of gender inequality in enrollment within higher education institutions across India.
- **To Explore Student Perspectives on Gender Inequality in Higher Education:** This objective seeks to understand the perspectives and opinions of students regarding various factors contributing to gender inequality in higher education, thereby providing insights into the multifaceted nature of this issue.

Research Methodology

Research Design: The study adopted a mixed-methods approach to gather comprehensive data on gender inequality in higher education enrollment in India. The mixed-methods approach involved both quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

Sampling Technique:

Quantitative Phase: The quantitative phase involved a stratified random sampling technique to ensure representation across different demographic groups. A sample of students from various higher education institutions across Rajasthan was selected based on stratification by gender, region, and institution type.

Qualitative Phase: The qualitative phase utilized purposive sampling to select participants who could provide rich insights into the research questions. Key stakeholders such as students and educators were purposively selected based on their knowledge and experience regarding gender inequality in higher education.

Data Collection Methods:

Quantitative Phase: Survey questionnaires were administered to a sample of 250 students to collect quantitative data on enrollment patterns, perceptions of gender inequality, and related factors. The survey included close-ended questions to gather demographic information to assess attitudes and perceptions.

Qualitative Phase: In-depth interviews were conducted with key stakeholders to explore their perspectives on gender inequality in higher education.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative Data: Descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, and measures ofcentral tendency were used to analyze quantitative data obtained from the survey.

Qualitative Data: Thematic analysis was employed to analyze qualitative data obtained from interviews and review of literature. Transcripts were coded and themes related to gender inequality in higher education were identified.

Limitations: Possible limitations of the study included sampling bias, self-reporting biases, and constraints related to time and resources. These limitations were acknowledged, and efforts were made to mitigate their impact on the validity and reliability of the findings.

Data Analysis and Interpretation
Demographic Variables:

Table-1 Total no. of respondents on the basis of gender

Respondents	Total (%)
Male	100 (40%)
Female	150 (60%)
Total	250

Source: fieldwork data

In table 1, the data presents the distribution of respondents based on gender in a study, with 40% identified as male and 60% as female out of a total of 250 respondents. This distributionhighlights a higher representation of female respondents compared to males within the study sample. Such a disparity in gender representation could stem from various factors.

Table- 2 Percentage distribution of the respondents on the basis of the Age

Age Group	Female	Male	Total
18-21	38 (25.3%)	23 (23%)	61 (24.4%)
22-25	52 (34.6%)	37 (37%)	89 (36.6%)
25>	60 (40%)	40 (40%)	100 (40%)
Total	150	100	250

Source: fieldwork data

Table 2 shows that overall, there were 250 respondents, with 150 (60%) being female and 100 (40%) being male. In the 18-21 age group, there were 61 respondents, comprising 38 females (25.3%) and 23 males (23%). In the 22-25 age group, there were 89 respondents, with 52 females (34.6%) and 37 males (37%). For respondents older than 25 years, totaling 100, the distribution was equal, with 60 females (40%) and 40 males (40%).

In table 3 the data reveals the distribution of respondents by degree level and gender in a study. Out of the total 250 respondents, 60% were female and 40% were male. Notably, females were more represented across all degree levels. In the undergraduate category (29.2% of respondents), females constituted 18.9% compared to males at 10.18%. Similarly, in postgraduate studies (26%of respondents), females accounted for 15.61%, while males were at 10.4%. In research (40% of respondents), females represented 24% and males 16%. For certificate/diploma programs (4.8% of respondents), females were 3.3%, and males 2.8%. This data underscores the differential representation of genders across degree levels, with females consistently constituting a higher percentage of respondents.

Table – 3 Percentage distribution of the respondents on the basis of the educational qualification

S.NO	Degree	Female	Male	Total
1	Under graduate	46 (18.9%)	27 (10.18%)	73 (29.2%)
2	Post graduate	39 (15.61%)	26 (10.4%)	65 (26%)
3	Research	60 (24%)	40 (16%)	100 (40%)
4	Certificate/diploma	5 (3.3%)	7 (2.8%)	12 (4.8%)
	Total	150	100	250

Source: fieldwork data

Empirical Analysis:

Table- 4 Student enrolment at various levels in higher education in India –

Year	Total Enrolment	Male	Female	% of male students	of female students
2016-2017	35705905	18980595	16725310	53.15%	46.84%
2017-2018	36642378	19204675	17437703	52.41%	47.58%
2018-2019	37399388	19209888	18189500	51.36%	48.63%
2019-2020	38536359	19643747	18892612	50.97%	49.02%
2020-2021	41380713	21237910	2012803	51.32%	48.67%

Source: All India Survey on Higher Education report 2021

In table 4 the data provided presents the total enrollment in higher education institutions over a five-year period, disaggregated by gender. Across the years 2016-2021, the total enrollment gradually increased, reaching its peak in the academic year 2020-2021 with 41,380,713 students. Analysis of gender distribution reveals consistent trends, with male students consistently constituting a higher percentage of total enrolment compared to female students. In the academic year 2016-2017, male students accounted for 53.15% of total enrollment, while female students comprised 46.84%. This trend persisted until the academic year 2019-2020, where male

students still constituted a slightly higher percentage at 50.97%, compared to 49.02% for female students.

However, in the academic year 2020-2021, the gender gap narrowed slightly, with male students representing 51.32% of total enrollment, while female students accounted for 48.67%. Overall, the data suggests a persistent gender disparity in higher education enrollment, with male students consistently outnumbering their female counterparts across the five-year period. Further exploration into the factors contributing to these gender disparities is warranted to inform efforts aimed at promoting gender equity and inclusivity in higher education.

Table- 5 Gender Distribution in Academic Program Enrollment: A Comparative Analysis between2016-17 and 2020-21

Particulars	2016-17	2016-17	2020-21	2020-21
Subject	Male	Female	Male	Female
PhD	58%	42%	55.1%	44.9%
MPhil	39.5%	60.5%	37.9%	62.1%
P.G.	43%	5 7%	43.5%	56.5%
U.G.	52.7	47.3	51.2%	48.8%
PG Diploma	56.7%	43.3%	55.8%	44.2%
Diploma	70%	30%	62.8%	37.2%
Certificate	51.5%	48.5%	53.7%	46.3%
Integrated	59%	41%	55.1%	44.9%

Source- AISHE report 2020-21

Table 5 illustrates the enrollment distribution across various academic programs categorized by gender for two academic years: 2016-17 and 2020-21. In 2016-17, the data indicates that there were more male students enrolled in PhD programs compared to female students, with 58% maleand 42% female. Conversely, MPhil programs saw a higher enrollment of female students, comprising 60.5% of the total enrollment. However, by 2020-21, there was a slight decrease in the proportion of male PhD students to 55.1%, while the percentage of female PhD students slightly increased to 44.9%. Similarly, in MPhil programs, the proportion of male students slightly decreased to 37.9%, while the percentage of female students slightly increased to 62.1%. Interestingly, the distribution in postgraduate programs (P.G.) remained relatively stable, with male students comprising 43% of enrollment and female students comprising 57% in 2016-17, and a slight decrease in female enrollment to 56.5% in 2020-21. Overall, the data suggests a shifting landscape in enrollment patterns across different academic programs, indicating potential changes in gender dynamics within higher education over time.

Table-6 Trends in Higher Education Enrollment and Stakeholder Perceptions

Policy Impacting Women's Participation	**Female**	**Male**	**Total**
Institutional scholarship	49 (32.6%)	31 (31%)	80 (32%)
Reservation of seats in admission	15 (10%)	18 (18%)	33 (13.2%)
Fees recession for women	21 (14%)	16 (16%)	37 (14.8%)
Increase in no. of women hostels	13 (8.66%)	9 (9%)	22 (8.8%)
Increase in no. of womenstaff	5 (3.3%)	2 (2%)	7 (2.8%)
Increase in security inside the campus	47 (31.3%)	24 (24%)	71 (28.4%)
University of Rajasthan Awareness			
Yes	47 (31.33%)	38 (38%)	85 (34%)
No (A) Poor Administration	24 (16%)	9 (9%)	33 (13.2%)
No (B) Poor Teacher-Student Interaction	18 (12%)	14 (14%)	32 (12.8%)
No (C) Limited Information Transmission	61 (40.66%)	29 (29%)	90 (36%)

Govt. Schemes for Women's Education			
Yes	127 (84.66%)	79 (79%)	206 (82.4%)
No	23 (15.33%)	21 (21%)	44 (17.6%)
Govt. Schemes Benefitted			
Yes	67 (44.66%)	53 (53%)	120 (48%)
No	83 (55.33%)	47 (47%)	130 (52%)
University Workshops on Gender Inequality			
No, it does not	17 (11%)	9 (9%)	26 (10.4%)
Yes, it does	31 (20.6%)	25 (25%)	56 (22.4%)
Yes, but very few attend	48 (32%)	43 (43%)	91 (36.4%)
Yes, but no impact	54 (36%)	23 (23%)	77 (30.8%)
Total	**150**	**100**	**250**

Source- fieldwork data

From table 6 we can interpret the following points-

Policies Impacting Women's Participation: The majority of respondents express support for institutional scholarships (32.6%) and an increase in security on campuses (31.3%) as measures to enhance female participation. However, there's relatively lower endorsement for initiatives like increasing the number of women staff (3.3%) and hostels (8.66%).

Government Schemes Benefitted: While a significant number of respondents report benefiting from government schemes (44.66%), a sizable portion indicates otherwise (55.33%). This suggests a need for further examination of the accessibility and impact of these schemes on women's education.

University Workshops on Gender Inequality: The data shows varied perceptions regarding the effectiveness of workshops conducted by universities on gender inequality. While some respondents acknowledge their impact (20.6%), others feel they have limited attendance (32%)or negligible impact (36%). This underscores the importance of evaluating the effectiveness and reach of such initiatives in addressing gender disparities in higher education.

Table 7 presents the gender distribution of students across five consecutive academic years from 2016-2017 to 2020-2021, along with the total number of students each year. In the initial year, 2016-2017, male students constituted 55.2% of the total student population, while female students comprised 44.98%. Over the years, there were fluctuations in the percentages of male and female students, with slight variations observed annually. However, by the academic year 2020-2021, male students accounted for 52.54% of the total, while female students comprised 47.46%. Despite fluctuations, the total number of students increased steadily each year, indicating a continuous growth in enrollment rates.

Table- 7 Gender Distribution Trends in Student Enrollment in Rajasthan: 2016-2017 to 2020-2021

Year	Male student	Female student	Total no. of students
2016-2017	994972 55.2%	813479 44.98%	1808451
2017-2018	1054511 54.46%	881693 45.53%	1936204
2018-2019	1082466 51.93	1001947 48.07%	2084413
2019-2020	1151186 52.18%	1055331 47.82%	2206517
2020-2021	1278304 52.54%	1154486 47.46%	2432790

Source- AISHE report 2020-21

Findings

- Student enrollment in higher education in India has steadily increased over the years, reaching its peak at 41,380,713 in the academic year 2020-2021.
- Across the five-year period from 2016-2017 to 2020-2021, male students consistently outnumbered female students, albeit with slight fluctuations in the percentages. In the academic year 2016-2017, male students comprised 53.15% of total enrollment, while femalestudents accounted for 46.84%. This trend persisted until 2019-2020, with male students slightly outnumbering females at 50.97% compared to 49.02%.
- However, in the academic year 2020-2021, there was a slight narrowing of the gender gap, with male students representing 51.32% of total enrollment, while female students constituted 48.67%.
- Additionally, the gender distribution across different academic programs varied. For instance, while male students dominated in PhD programs in 2016-2017, there was a slight decrease in their proportion by 2020-2021. Conversely, there was an increase in female enrollment in PhD and M.Phil. programs over the same period.
- In Rajasthan specifically, the gender distribution of students followed a similar trend, with male students consistently comprising a higher percentage of total enrollment compared to female students across the academic years analyzed (2016-2017 to 2020-2021).
- Institutional scholarships and increased campus security are generally supported measures, while initiatives like increasing the number of women staff and hostels receive comparativelyless endorsement.
- Approximately one-third of respondents recognize the University of Rajasthan's efforts in spreading awareness about higher education, but concerns about poor administration and limited information transmission are notable.
- A majority of respondents believe that government schemes help women access highereducation, but a significant portion disagrees, suggesting room for improvement in implementation or effectiveness.
- While many respondents report benefiting from government schemes, a considerable number indicates otherwise, highlighting the need for further examination of accessibility and impact.
- Perceptions about the effectiveness of workshops on gender inequality vary, with some acknowledging their impact, while others feel they have limited attendance or negligible impact.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the data illustrates a progressive increase in student enrollment in higher educationin India, with the total reaching a peak of 41,380,713 in the academic year 2020-2021. However, a persistent gender disparity is evident throughout the five-year period analyzed, with male students consistently outnumbering female counterparts, albeit with slight fluctuations. While thegap narrowed marginally in 2020-2021, gender distribution across academic programs varied, reflecting evolving trends. Furthermore, the findings shed light on stakeholders' perceptions regarding policies and initiatives aimed at promoting women's participation in higher education. While institutional scholarships and campus security garner general support, concerns about administration and limited awareness transmission are highlighted. The study also underscores

divergent views on the effectiveness of government schemes and gender equality workshops, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address gender disparities and enhance inclusivity in higher education.

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