



# Shaping Equality: The Impact Of Education On Women's Empowerment

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## Abstract

Education is also instrumental in creating a more equal and just society since it empowers women in various aspects. The paper discusses how education is a strong instrument of changing the lives of women through making them more confident, more aware, and self-reliant. It postulates that education does not just involve the acquisition of knowledge but it also empowers women to be in a position to make informed choices, oppose social inequalities and even contribute to social, economic, and political aspects. It allows women to be more conscious of their rights and opportunities and thus they can overcome traditional restrictions and discrimination. The paper also brings out the fact that educated women are important to the health of their families and communities thus forming a cycle of healthy social development. Simultaneously, it addresses the current issues of low level of education access, social restriction and economic limitations still impeding the development of women. In general, as it is stressed in the paper, women need to be empowered through education, and an inclusive and balanced society, and more efforts should be made to make sure that women have equal access to education.

**Keywords:** Education, Empowers, Discrimination, Economic Limitations, Equal

## 1. Introduction

Women empowerment as a concept is a phenomenon that symbolizes a major transformation in the discourse of development during the past half-century. Empowerment is the act of enhancing individual, political, social, or economic capacity of persons and communities, in this case, allowing women and girls to acquire power and make decisions on their lives. Not only is this a technical process but also a politically compound undertaking to influence the attitudes and policy-making that would support the fair allocation of resources. Fundamentally, empowerment is in the capacity of a man to determine his own future, and this means that in order to be empowered, women should be equally gifted in terms of education and health among others as well as have equal access to resources and the power to utilize those resources. The main process of developing this agency is the education, which is the mechanism that broadens options and empowers women to renegotiate gender roles.

Empowerment is more of a process than a product and it changes towards a state of being unempowered to one that is self-reliant and in charge. It entails sensitization, development of self-confidence and measures to change the structures and institutions that entrench gender discrimination. Although the terms are said to be used interchangeably, empowerment is the process by which equality is brought. Gender equality as such refers to the fact that women and men are equal in conditions and

prospects of achieving their potential and human rights. This model and the incorporation of education into it forms a virtuous cycle, where the more women are educated the more, they are able to fight against the system and this gives more opportunities to the next women and girls generation.

## **2. Theoretical Frameworks of Educational Empowerment**

The impact of education on women's empowerment is viewed through diverse theoretical lenses that prioritize different outcomes and mechanisms. The divergence between these frameworks often dictates how development programs are designed and measured.

### **I. The Human Capital Theory**

The human capital theory is still a hegemonic theory of capitalist economic models and is often advocated by global financial organizations such as the World Bank. This is fundamentally instrumentalist in which women education is considered as an important input to economic production. In this context, education has been treated as a valuable investment as it raises the level of stocks of skills and knowledge in a group of people, which enhances labor productivity and national GDP. This is because, were the women to attain the same equity as men in the labor market, the world would experience an increase of up to 28 trillion or 26 percent in the global annual GDP by the year 2025.

According to the human capital view, investment in female education is a good one, as educated mothers are more efficient in achievement of social objectives in lowering child mortality and fertility rates. Nevertheless, this instrumentalist position has been criticized as reinforcing traditional positions instead of challenging the structuring of inequality. Consider, when education is simply appreciated as a better mother, a better homemaker, one might never question the basic norms and practices that are oppressive to women, including dowries or men controlling the resources, etc.

### **II. The Capability Theory**

As an alternative to human capital theory, the capability approach, pioneered by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, focuses on the moral significance of individuals' capabilities to achieve the lives they have reason to value. This is based on the substantive freedoms or what an individual can actually do and be as opposed to the resources they have. In this regard, education is not a means of economic production, but an agent of well-being and agency. It is a good in itself that allows women to build their senses, imagination, and thoughts and to critically reflect on how their lives will be planned.

The capability approach identifies "conversion factors"—personal, sociopolitical, and environmental conditions—that determine whether a woman can turn an educational resource (like a diploma) into a functioning (like a career). For instance, a woman may have the formal right to work, but without the capability to move freely or be secure against domestic violence, that right cannot be realized. Thus, the capability approach demands a broader, multi-criteria framework for assessing education that takes into account social justice, human dignity, and the aspirations of individuals.

## **3. Historical Evolution of Women's Education in India**

The history of women's education in India provides a compelling case study of the fluctuations between empowerment and regressive social norms. The Indian experience illustrates how education has been used both as a tool for scholarly pursuit and as a site of social struggle.

### **I. Ancient and Vedic Period**

The status of women was quite high in ancient India and especially in the Vedic era they could access education. The bible and Vedic accounts show a society whose women such as Gargi and Maitreyi were respected as well-known scholars and philosophers who contributed to spiritual and intellectual controversies. This was a period when women were free to read and write and intellectual growth was appreciated amongst the sexes. Nevertheless, the subsequent Vedic era saw a fall in the position of women

because social orders became stricter and more hierarchical and women had to be restricted in their rights and freedoms including the right to education.

## II. Medieval Stagnation

The status of women in the Indian society deteriorated even more during the medieval period due to the dominating culture and political practices. This was the period of the emergence of orthodoxy, i.e. child marriage, the system of the purdah (veil), the overall exclusion of women out of the social life. These retrogressive customs practically denied most women education. Informal education in arts, crafts, and religion continued in some communities, but the opportunities in the academic and intellectual fields were few.

## III. Colonial Era and the Dawn of Reform

The modern revival of interest in women education started with the coming of the British in the 18th century and the rise of Indian social reform movements. Such early workers as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Jyotirao Phule understood that educating women was a critical step towards the country and cessation of oppressive marriage practices like Sati and child marriage.

In 1848, Savitribai Phule and her husband Jyotirao Phule opened the first school to girls in Pune and this is regarded as a pinnacle in the history of Indian education. There were other notable achievements that ensued: the Native Female School (later Bethune School) was founded in Calcutta in the year 1849, and in 1878 the first Indian university to take women to degree programmes, the University of Calcutta. The first female graduates in India were Kadambini Ganguly and Chandramukhi Bose who graduated in 1882. In 1916, the first women university in India was established by Dr. Dhondo Keshav Karve called Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (SNDT) Women's University in Mumbai.

## IV. Post-Independence and Contemporary Policies

The government made several initiatives in the provision of education to every woman after the acquisition of independence in 1947 and literacy rates increased drastically. Literacy levels of women increased by a humble 7 percent in 1951, to a high of more than 54 percent in 2001 and in the more recent years, literacy levels among women rose to an average of 65.46 percent in the country. The government began to adopt the development focus as opposed to the welfare focus with the Fifth Five-Year Plan in 1974-78 and more recently, empowerment.

Current campaigns such as "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" (Save the Girl Child, Educate the Girl Child) (2015) campaign, are expected to alter the societal attitude towards the girl child and guarantee her survival and education. Other schemes like the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya scheme are education schemes of girls in the marginalised sections of the society that is, in the areas where girls are illiterate.

### 4. Barriers to Women's Empowerment

The gender gap in the labour force participation has been reported as 30 percent globally since 1990 where men take up 80 percent and women take up 50 percent. The women are also not likely to access the social protection in terms of employment, of the women in wage employment 73.5 percent of them do not have access to either pensions or unemployment insurance benefits. Education helps to address these gaps by training women to be a part of the formal labour market and occupy top leadership roles, which consequently leads to growth and improved organizational performance.

There are distinct disadvantages against women in opening and operating businesses. Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) owned by women are mostly informal, small scale and focused on low productivity areas hence easily affected by economic crises. The commonly missing entrepreneur's problem is a gender issue mostly; it is estimated that could be 24.8 million more women

who are entrepreneurs in OECD in case women were attracted to early-stage entrepreneurship as much as men.

The transformation of women leadership in the education system in itself is a force. Although there is a leaky pipeline where the number of women decreases as the educational attainment increases, the women who do attain leadership positions tend to focus on inclusion, cooperation, and career growth. Female school leaders have been discovered to provide real equitable and prosperous school environments to all students in low-income countries, and thus act as role models to the future generation of girls.

Higher levels of formal education are strongly associated with women voting in elections and occupying political posts. In India, female politicians are often more highly educated than their male counterparts, with 77.5% of female representatives in some state assemblies holding graduate or post-graduate degrees. This highlights an evident link between literacy and politics for women, where education serves as a prerequisite for institutional participation.

## 5. Conclusion

The cornerstone of equality formulation and women empowerment in all fields of life is education. It is both a way of pursuing the larger development purposes and also an end in itself which adds to individual dignity and competence. It is found through the analysis that the effect of education is not only a transference of literacy but a initiator of systemic change in the home, the economy, as well as the political sphere.

To accelerate progress toward the 2030 Agenda, the following strategic directions are essential:

To begin with, school policies should not just be about access and enrollment. It is needed to have a gender-transformative perspective of education, the one that does not only empower girls as individuals, but also deals with the infrastructural obstacles, gender norms, and stereotypes that hold their potential down. This will include educating the teachers in gender responsive pedagogy and removing the stereotypes in textbooks.

Second, the issue of infrastructure and safety is a no-go. Constructions of gender-sensitive WASH centers and minimization of traveling distance to school are also good strategies that directly enhance the attendance and retention of girls. Schools need to be places of refuge where the girls are able to have the decency and security to learn.

Third, education and politics should become more accommodative to women with education. To make sure that educational benefits can be overturned into practical power, it is essential to eliminate the gender gap in financing women entrepreneurs as well as to introduce quotas related to the role of women in politics. They should be accompanied by education with messages that facilitate efficacy to develop the psychological resources that one needs to lead.

Lastly, intergenerational disadvantage cycle should be ended by the long-term investment in maternal human capital. The best approaches to ensure health and nutrition of children, less maternal death and a more successful and fair future of everyone are education and delaying marriage among girls. The process of empowerment is a liberation and education is the guide to the path.

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