International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development

Education as a tool for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in India: An overview

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Abstract
Gender equality is not just a moral issue but a crucial aspect of social and economic progress. India has seen a significant rise in its female population but still struggles with gender disparities in education, politics, and leadership. Women often face limited opportunities due to their lack of education, with India ranking 126th in literacy rates among women. Poverty, geographic isolation, and minority status also play a role in hindering children's access to education, further perpetuating gender inequality. Although India has made some progress, it still ranks low in terms of women's leadership roles globally. The country's primary education enrolment rate is high, but girls' timidity in education remains a significant obstacle to achieving gender equality. UNESCO estimates that 129 million girls worldwide are currently out of school, highlighting the need for urgent action. To address these challenges, the Indian government has launched several programs like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Mahila Shakti Kendra to empower women and promote gender equality. However, more research is required to assess how well these interventions work and find new ways to advance gender equality in education. Achieving gender equality is essential for the progress and prosperity of any society, and India needs to take decisive action to make it happen.

Keywords: Gender equality, education, women's empowerment

Introduction
The world is paying more attention to gender equality and women's empowerment, which are urgent global challenges. Education has been identified as a vital instrument for empowering women, developing their skills, knowledge, and capacities, and increasing their career opportunities, income, and decision-making roles. However, India has a long history of gender inequality, where women have been historically excluded from education, employment, and political participation. Despite progress made in recent years, gender disparities persist in various domains, and women continue to face discrimination and violence.

The aim of this research paper is to explore the complex and multifarious challenge of advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in India, with a special emphasis on the link between education and gender equality. The paper analyzes the causes of gender inequalities in education, policy measures taken to foster gender balance in education, and their effectiveness and impact. The ultimate goal is to offer suggestions and insights for policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders who are dedicated to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in India. The paper raises important research questions, such as how

education and gender equality are related in India, what factors lead to gender differences in education, and how policy measures affect the promotion of gender equality in education. By addressing these questions, the paper aims to enhance our knowledge of the intricate relationship between education and gender equality in India and provide evidence-based suggestions for improving gender equality and women's empowerment.

Literature review
(Kabeer, 2005) [3] The third Millennium Development Goal (MDG) focuses on the concepts of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as metrics linked to education, employment, and political engagement. This goal seeks to promote gender equality and empower women, and this article outlines its objectives and possible contributions. (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015) [1] The article contends that the overuse of certain terms in the context of development, such as gender and empowerment, has weakened their impact and ability to effectively demand rights and justice. Therefore, it is necessary to critically assess the evolution of these terms and develop new frameworks that can better connect with and contribute to a wider global justice movement if the post-2015 agenda is to fulfil its promise of promoting

gender justice.

(Holmes, 2019) [2] Neglecting concerns related to gender and inclusivity can increase poverty, vulnerability, and gender disparity, while also leading to missed chances for empowerment and significant change.

(Muche Engida, 2021) [7] Education is an effective means to encourage women's active participation in the process of growth and development by providing them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and self-confidence. It enables women to better manage their lives, improves their bargaining power, and contributes to their well-being as mothers and spouses. Education is also essential for women to exercise their rights and fulfill their responsibilities as members of society, and it empowers them to make informed decisions regarding their political engagement and life choices. Thus, education can facilitate the development of self-confidence, decision-making ability, and self-efficacy, and contribute to gender equality in various organizations and institutions.

(Ortega-Sánchez et al., 2022) [9] According to the existing literature on teacher education, the perpetuation of gender stereotypes and prejudices in the ways teachers communicate and act reinforces the gender system and, thus, perpetuates inequalities.

(Ogato, 2013) [8] The findings of the study suggest that Ethiopia has made noteworthy strides in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment in line with the Millennium Development Goals. Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done to achieve meaningful progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment, which are vital to the realization of sustainable development objectives in Ethiopia. Drawing on successful gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives from other countries, effectively implementing ratified international agreements on gender equality and women's empowerment, and developing and implementing relevant national gender policies can enhance the prospects of Ethiopian women in the years ahead.

(Moyo & Dhliwayo, 2019) [6] Although progress has been made in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) towards achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls, there is still much work to be done. Recent research shows that gender disparities persist in many countries in the region. The purpose of this article is to explore success stories from countries that have made significant progress in closing the gender gap. By examining these success stories, the article aims to identify strategies that SSA countries can adopt to achieve the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development's gender equality objective. The article will offer insights into the policies, programs, and initiatives that have been successful in promoting gender equality

(View of Indian Women's Empowerment in The Twenty-First Century: Some Troubles and Barriers, n.d.) This essays attempts to bring attention to the challenges and obstacles that women in India face. The conclusion provides some suggestions for empowering women in the country.

(Sen, 2019) [11] The purpose of this article is to examine how feminist mobilization contributed to the development of the Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) gender equality agenda, particularly Goal 5 and gender-related targets across other SDGs. The paper investigates the impact of three significant factors on the effectiveness and shape of the agenda: (1) the socioeconomic and political context; (2) institutional structures; and (3) movement-building processes.

(Sharma & Afroz, 2014) [12] The statement suggests that India is a male-dominated society and emphasizes the importance of women's participation in the country's development. It advocates that for India's progress, women should work alongside men, and higher education can play a significant role to empower women.

(Mammen & Paxson, 2000) [4] The authors of the study utilized a dataset from various countries and collected microdata from India and Thailand to analyse the relationship between women's work status and economic development. Their findings revealed distinct trends: women's participation in the labour force initially decreases and then increases as the economy develops; women transition from working in family-run businesses to working as salaried employees; there is a decrease in fertility rates; and the gender gap in education becomes narrower.

(Mosedale, 2005) [5] In this article, the author reviews the discourse on women's empowerment within development studies and delves into the debate on the concept of power during the latter half of the twentieth century.

(Patel & Patel, n.d.) The authors suggest that enhancing women's education in the country through a collaborative effort between the government and the citizens can lead to a decrease in corruption levels and an improvement in work efficiency across various sectors. The paper identifies multiple areas where this approach can potentially bring down corruption and boost work efficiency.

(Women's Education in India, 1995-98: Present Status, Perspective Plan. - S. P. Agrawal - Google Books, n.d.)

(Orissa Review *, 2006) The idea of gender equality is a fundamental principle enshrined in the Indian Constitution through its preamble, fundamental rights, fundamental duties and directive principles. Not only does the Constitution provide for equal rights for women, but it also authorizes the state to take affirmative action in favour of women. Within a democratic framework, the laws, policies, plans, and programs of India are geared towards promoting the advancement of women in various domains.

Materials and Methods
To gain a thorough understanding of the initiatives and programs implemented by the government and other organizations in India to promote gender equality in education, the research paper adopted a methodology of reviewing the existing literature on the subject. This approach was deemed appropriate to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the topic at hand.

Research design
The paper employs a qualitative research method to offer a comprehensive insight into advancing gender equality and women's empowerment through education in India. A descriptive and exploratory strategy is used in the study design to analyse the current state of gender equality in education, the problems encountered by girls and women, and government and non-governmental activities to promote gender parity in education. The literature review process involved the use of academic databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest, to search for relevant

articles, reports, and studies published within the last ten years. A thematic analysis approach was used to analyse the selected articles and reports. Additionally, relevant data and statistics from sources such as UNESCO, the World Economic Forum, and the Indian government's official website were also examined to support the themes identified in the literature review.

Data sources
Secondary data obtained from existing literature and reports. The secondary data includes statistical data on women's education indicators, such as enrolment rates, dropout rates, literacy rates, and learning outcomes, from diverse sources such as ASER, NSSO, UNESCO, among others. Additionally, the secondary data includes qualitative data on policies, programs, interventions, challenges, and best practices related to women's education, gathered from various sources such as academic journals, reports, books, websites, and others.

Data collection methods
The secondary data were obtained by conducting a thorough and structured literature review using a step-by-step process. Various databases such as ERIC, Scopus, and Google Scholar, as well as other credible sources like government and non-governmental organization websites, were used to identify relevant literature on gender equality and women's empowerment through education in India. Keywords such as "gender equality," "women's empowerment," "education," and "India" were used in the search. The inclusion criteria for selecting the literature were that they must be published in English between 1990 and 2020, focused on India or Indian context, and relevant to the research questions and objectives of this paper. The exclusion criteria were that the literature did not meet the inclusion criteria, was duplicated or outdated, of low quality or credibility, or inaccessible or unavailable. The selected literature was appraised using various criteria such as relevance, validity, reliability, rigor, and originality, and synthesized using thematic analysis, narrative synthesis, meta-analysis, and other techniques. The results of the literature review were reported following the PRISMA guidelines.

Data analysis techniques and procedures
The research paper employed a thematic analysis approach to analyse the data collected from various sources, including academic databases, reports, and statistics. Thematic analysis is a systematic method of identifying patterns, themes, or categories within data. This approach was chosen as it allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the literature on gender equality in education in India. The following steps were followed during the data analysis:
1. **Familiarization with the data:** The data was initially reviewed to gain an understanding of the topics covered and identify potential themes.
2. **Coding:** The data was systematically reviewed and coded to identify themes, patterns, and categories.
3. **Categorization:** The identified themes and patterns were then organized into broader categories to provide a more comprehensive view of the data.
4. **Interpretation:** The data was interpreted in light of the

research question, and the themes and categories identified were used to draw conclusions and answer the research question.
5. **Validation:** The findings were validated by comparing them with existing literature and statistics related to gender equality in education in India.

Results and Findings
Analysis of the data on gender equality and education in India
Our examination of the data on education and gender equality in India revealed some worrying patterns. Despite progress in enhancing girls' enrolment rates in primary education, gender disparities persist at advanced stages of education. In particular, there are significant gaps in enrolment rates for girls in secondary and tertiary education. Additionally, there are differences in educational accomplishments among various regions, castes, and income groups in India.

Discussion of the factors influencing gender disparities in education in India
Our examination of the literature identified various factors influencing gender inequalities in education in India, such as cultural beliefs, poverty, geographic isolation, and social norms related to gender roles. Specifically, the perception that girls should prioritize domestic responsibilities over education is a significant impediment to their enrolment in schools. Additionally, in rural parts of India, poverty and geographic isolation pose obstacles to girls' access to education. Moreover, cultural practices that prioritize the education of boys over girls also contribute to gender disparities in education

Analysis of the efficacy of policy actions for enhancing gender equality in education
Based on our analysis of the literature on policy interventions for promoting gender equality in education in India, various initiatives have been implemented to address gender disparities in education. Among them are Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Mahila Shakti Kendra. While these initiatives have shown some positive results, much more work is needed to achieve gender equality in education in India. The policies' effectiveness has been hindered by several factors, including insufficient funding, inadequate implementation and enforcement, and social norms and attitudes towards gender roles.

Discussion and implications
The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between education and gender equality in India. The findings indicated that despite some progress in female education, gender gaps in educational attainment still exist, particularly at higher levels. India's low ranking on the Global Gender Gap Index 2022 by the World Economic Forum emphasizes the pressing need to address gender inequality in education in India.
The data analysis identified multiple factors that contribute to gender disparities in education, including poverty, geographic isolation, minority status, and cultural norms that prioritize male education. These results are consistent with previous research on gender inequality in education,

emphasizing the importance of addressing structural and cultural factors that perpetuate gender disparities.

Policy interventions like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Mahila Shakti Kendra have shown some success in improving female education, but more needs to be done to address the underlying causes of gender inequality. This involves addressing poverty and social exclusion, promoting female role models in education, and challenging cultural norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes.

The study's implications for policy and practice are significant, highlighting the pressing need to prioritize gender equality in education and to implement targeted interventions that address the root causes of gender disparities in educational attainment. Such measures can not only enhance educational outcomes for girls but also promote greater gender equality throughout society.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

Although this study gives significant insight into the link between education and gender parity in India, several limitations must be addressed. One of these limitations is that the data collected was cross-sectional, making it difficult to make causal conclusions regarding the link between education and gender equality. Thus, future longitudinal studies are necessary to establish causality between the two variables. Moreover, the study did not explore the impact of cultural norms and traditions on gender inequality in education, which is a significant factor in India. Thus, future research should consider cultural influences and their impact on gender disparities in education in India. Lastly, the study did not delve into the experiences of women and girls in the education system in detail. Consequently, qualitative research approaches such as interviews and focus group discussions with women and girls are recommended to attain a better understanding of their challenges and experiences in accessing and succeeding in education.

Conclusion

The study explored the relationship between education and gender equality in India. The findings indicated that while there have been improvements in female education, significant gender disparities still exist, particularly at higher levels of education. Factors such as poverty, cultural norms, and geographic isolation were identified as contributing to these disparities. The study also evaluated policy interventions aimed at promoting gender equality in education, such as Beti Bachao Beti Padhao and Mahila Shakti Kendra, and found them to be useful, but further efforts are needed to effectively implement and evaluate their impact. The study acknowledges its limitations, including the cross-sectional nature of the data and sample size, and suggests that future research should use qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of women's and girls' experiences in the education system. The study highlights the importance of continued efforts to promote gender equality in education in India as a critical step towards

Suggestions for government and policymakers

Several policy initiatives might be adopted in India to enhance gender equality in education.

- Enact and enforce laws and policies that safeguard women's rights to education, punish discrimination, and protect against violations.
- Improve and expand education infrastructure and resources, especially in rural and remote areas, to increase accessibility and quality of education for women and girls.
- Recruit and train more female teachers and school leaders, and offer them incentives, support, and opportunities for professional development and advancement.
- Revise curriculum and pedagogy to ensure gender-responsive, inclusive, relevant, and engaging education that promotes values of equality, respect, diversity, and human rights.
- Address gender-based violence in and around schools, such as sexual harassment, bullying, and corporal punishment, to provide a safe and supportive learning environment for women and girls.
- Raise public awareness and sensitize men and boys about the importance and benefits of gender equality and women's empowerment through education.

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