



The Impact of Gender on Educational Attainment and Classroom Involvement

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Abstract

The present study talks about the impact gender holds on the educational attainment and classroom involvement of students. It sheds light on the cultural, social, and institutional factors that shape the academic experience of students in India. Though there have been significant changes in the availability of education for all, there still persists major gaps, which needs to be filled at the classroom level itself. The present study focuses on patriarchal norms, gendered chores wearing the garb of domestic responsibility, and the biases society holds against women - even or rather especially in their formative years - and girls, and impacts their educational opportunities. Simultaneously, the same society uplifts and reinforces male privilege. The current paper refers to works by eminent feminists like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Bell Hooks, as well as Raewyn Connell. Apart from academic perspectives, the current paper also analyses media representation of this theme, which is appropriately reflected in *Balika Vadhu*, an Indian serial focusing on a female individual who loses her love, interest and right to study to marriage. The paper discusses the qualitative and quantitative result of a brief questionnaire administered to teachers as well as students, and explores the findings which reveal, how girls - to this day and age - face gender biasness, especially in the world of academics.

Keywords: matrilineal, patriarchal, literacy, workforce participation, women

Introduction:

Gender discrimination has been a centuries-old battle that is still being fought. Despite global strides toward gender equality, disparities in educational opportunities, engagement, and achievements persist. Historically, boys' education has been given major priority due to patriarchal structures; meanwhile, girls' education was either limited, neglected, or outright denied owing to societal expectations, economic constraints, and cultural biases. Boys were expected to study, chase success, be financially stable, and become the most prominent figure by providing for their families. On the other hand, girls were, and still are, expected to confine themselves to domestic responsibilities, leaving them with fewer opportunities to access formal education, autonomy, and financial independence. Although significant progress has been made, several issues regarding educational disparities, including, but not limited to, dropout rates for girls, classroom participation disparities, teacher expectations, self-perceptions among students, and subject-specific gender gaps, persist. To this day, several regions deny girls' education because of discrimination under the garb of distance and inaccessibility. If the girls somehow manage to claw their way into the classroom, they face inequality there as well. Through the lens of gender differences in education today, age-specific patterns of gender inequalities within the educational career need to be taken into account.



The present study aims to explore how gender influences educational attainment and classroom involvement by analyzing existing literature, media, and theoretical frameworks, with a focus on cultural and economic norms.

Need of the Study:

The role of gender in education is a topic that is not new but something that has been present for a long time and something that still persists today, and hence the problems faced by girls in education due to gender persist. There are cultural practices and social norms still in place that either restrict female education or make it extremely difficult to attain. Hence, it is important to keep looking into this matter and resolve the issues at its roots. This topic explores and addresses how gender affects educational attainment and classroom involvement. As a female student studying in an institution catering to women's education, I am passionate about female education, and I find it important to enlighten myself and others on this topic.

Review of Literature:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) is a powerful critique portraying the way gender roles shape opportunities, expectations, as well as participation in various aspects of life, like education. It highlights how deeply ingrained gender norms are and how far internalized cultural expectations can shape the behavior and opportunities of people solely based on their gender. In her work, Adichie explores how girls are taught to be less than men from the very beginning. She stresses-through anecdotal records, how women and girls are not only denied their achievements and right to education, but also snatched away to soothe the bruised ego of the gender narrative. "*We teach girls to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller. We say to girls, 'You can have ambition, but not too much. You should aim to be successful, but not too successful. Otherwise, you will threaten the man.'*" Adichie, in her work, highlights the importance of not only addressing but also challenging the systematic barriers that care more about prioritizing the male as supreme rather than the rights of the marginalized gender. She sheds light on how societal expectations often become a barrier to girls' academic performance. Society pressurizes girls and women into domestic roles and later uses the disparities in the educational outcomes of girls and boys as irrefutable proof that women belong in the kitchen. This leads to lower enrollment rates for girls in certain regions, early marriage, or their underrepresentation in higher education.

The barriers in educational attainment cannot be simply viewed through the lens of gender only. The degree to which gender impacts educational attainment in the classroom is also determined through the larger lens of race, class, and sexuality.

Bell Hooks, through her *theory of intersectional feminism* (1984), provides an additional perspective for examining and analyzing the impact gender has on educational attainment and classroom involvement. It postulates that gender cannot be explored in isolation but must be perceived in conjunction with various variables such as sexuality, race, and class. She states, "*The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy... It is the place where the conditions for the development of critical consciousness are created.*" Hooks calls for a pedagogical liberation that coincidentally aligns with the attempts to formulate an equitable educational space where gender and other intersecting identities do not hinder - or create hurdles - students' opportunities for participation, achievement, and success. Race, sexuality, and class are not the only lenses through which gender disparity should be viewed. The intertwining red threads of power, production, and emotion add to the various different angles this issue can be viewed in. The gender order is a patterned system



of ideological and material practices, performed by individuals in a society, through which power relations between women and men are made, and remade, as meaningful. The forms, codes, labels or categories of masculinity and femininity are created, reshaped, rebranded and renovated through the deep rooted gender order still persistent in our society.

Raewyn Connell's *Gender Order Theory* (1987) provides a powerful lens for understanding the impact of gender on educational attainment and classroom involvement. Connell has seamlessly woven the concept and theme of the gender order persistent even today into the threads of her social theory of gender, where gender hierarchies or orders forms a motif for the creation of human agency, which at an institutional and structural level also acts to constrain individual agency. It postulates that gender is not a fixed binary but rather a social structure put together through the combination of power, production, and emotion, which she respectively names *hegemonic masculinity*, *emphasized femininity*, and *subordinated masculinities and femininities*, and simultaneously analyzes how educational systems are complicit in perpetuating these gendered power dynamics. For instance, the dominant part of masculinity - hegemonic masculinity- provides privilege to traits like competitiveness and assertiveness, which often have some or the other influence on classroom dynamics, leading to marginalization of girls and non-conforming students who are taught, - from the beginning, - to be silent and invisible. This, in turn, takes the shape of emphasized femininity, which accentuates compliance, timidity, and nurturing, and ultimately limits their participation and representation in leadership roles. Connell states that "*schools are active agents in the construction of gender*," which means that educational institutions play a key role in reproducing or challenging societal gender hierarchies.

Media Analysis:

The Indian television series *Balika Vadhu* (2008–2016), which was formerly broadcast on "Colours TV," offered a powerful depiction of how local customs and gender norms affect girls' participation in and achievement in school. Child marriage, opposition to girls' education, cultural perceptions of girls as inferior to boys, and the transformational potential of educators and educational institutions are all topics covered in the series. Through the depiction of the life of the protagonist - Anandi - who was married off as a child despite her love for and intention to continue her education, *Balika Vadhu* holds up a mirror to society on their role in crushing the dreams and aspirations of young women and locking them behind bars of cookery and domestic chores. It also offers the harrowing tale of how traditional gender roles and expectations disproportionately affect girls' educational opportunities. The show portrays how Anandi's in-laws initially resist her desire to continue her education, underlining the societal belief that a girl's primary role is to be a wife and homemaker only. In one of the episodes, Anandi's mother-in-law goes as far as to say, "*Ladkiyon ka kaamg harsam bhalna hai, padhai-likhai se kya faida?*" ("Girls are meant to manage the household, what's the use of education?"). This dialogue encapsulates the gendered attitudes that devalue girls' education and prioritize domestic roles, directly linking to the paper's exploration of how gender norms impact educational attainment. The issue of child marriage, which disproportionately affects girls, as they are often married off to grown men, and boys are allowed to continue their education even if they are made to get involved in child marriages, is not a story of the past, but is something that continues to this day in the modern era. *Laapataa Ladies* (2023) deals with similar themes and resonated widely throughout the female audience.



Methodology:

This study incorporates a mixture of approaches, including qualitative and quantitative research. It explores primary and secondary sources to better understand and reflect on the impact of gender on educational attainment and classroom involvement.

1. Content assimilation

The content was procured after research was done, using secondary sources like various literature. Their review was done to understand the topic better.

2. Primary sources, such as media content, including but not limited to *Balika Vadhu* (2008-2016) were referenced, and its popularity was studied to analyze audience response and gauge the cultural opinion regarding female education.
3. Secondary sources, which formed a chunk of the literature review, were combed through to formulate the theory regarding the study. The secondary sources include, but are not limited to:

A. *We Should All Be Feminists* (2014) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

B. *The theory of Intersectional Feminism* (1984) by Bell Hooks

C. *Gender Order Theory* (1987) by Raewyn Connell

4. Quantitative data collection included going through historical or government records and NGO reports, such as U-DISE (Unified District Information System for Education) and ASER (Annual Status of Education Report).
5. Separate Questionnaires/Google Forms prepared by the researcher for students and teachers regarding their experiences and opinions on gender differences regarding educational attainment and classroom involvement formed the qualitative data collection for this theory.
6. Proper consent is taken from participants, ensuring that their data remains private

Objective:

Addressing gender disparities in the classroom and how they affect educational attainment and classroom participation is a crucial step towards equal and quality education. Keeping this in context, the following objectives can be structured as research questions:

1. What is the effect of gender on enrollment, retention, and achievement in schools across different regions of India?
2. What is the role of society and culture in shaping gendered classroom involvement?
3. What is the role of the teacher in influencing students' academic experiences based on gender?
4. How does family play a role in a child's academic life?
5. What are the differences between male and female students?
6. What is the influence of gender on classroom involvement?



Results and Discussions:

The responses from the Google form questionnaire indicate that gender plays a big role in shaping educational opportunities and classroom experiences. Many responses pointed out that girls, especially in rural areas, often face hurdles like early marriage, household chores, and family expectations that favor boys' education over theirs. For example, one response mentioned how girls are expected to help at home, leaving little time for schoolwork. In classrooms, the dynamics are also heavily influenced by gender. Boys tend to dominate discussions and activities, while girls are often pushed to the sidelines, especially in subjects like math and science, which are seen as "boys' subjects." The data also shows that girls from marginalized communities – like those from lower-income families or minority groups – face even more challenges because of their intersecting identities. On a brighter note, some responses highlighted how education can be a game-changer for girls, helping them break free from traditional roles and become leaders in their communities.

The findings from the questionnaires circulated through the means of 'Google Forms' have important implications for everyone involved in education – policymakers, teachers, and society as a whole. First, there's a clear need for policies that tackle the barriers keeping girls out of school. Things like banning child marriage, providing scholarships, and ensuring safe transportation to school can make a huge difference. Schools and teachers also need to rethink how they run their classrooms. Teachers should be trained to create an environment where girls feel encouraged to speak up, take on leadership roles, and explore subjects like science and math without feeling out of place. For girls from marginalized communities, extra support like mentorship programs or community outreach can help level the playing field. Beyond schools, there's a need to change how society views girls' education. Campaigns that challenge stereotypes and community discussions involving local leaders can help shift mindsets. When families and communities start valuing education for girls as much as they do for boys, it can lead to lasting change. By addressing these issues from all angles, we can build an education system that truly works for everyone, regardless of gender.

Conclusion:

As teachers and human beings, it is our utmost responsibility to look out for our signs which make us bend to this patriarchal need of elevating men and caging women, be it under the illusion of protection or safety. It is the responsibility of the society, of which we are a part of, to stand up to this partiality that is sometimes so subtle that it misses recognition and identification. The classroom and society belong to the girls and women as much as it belongs to boys and men. Our future leaders, who are preparing to change the world should not be confined to worrying about changing the mindsets of the patriarchy-loving individuals who still form a core portion of our society.

Recommendations:

Educational institutions and teachers play a crucial role in addressing the impact of gender on educational attainment and classroom involvement. Schools can start by creating safe and inclusive environments where all students, regardless of gender, feel valued and supported. This means implementing strict anti-discrimination policies and ensuring that classrooms are free from bullying or harassment. Teachers, as the front-line influencers, can adopt teaching methods that encourage equal participation. For example, they can use group activities and discussions that give every student a chance to speak, ensuring that girls aren't overshadowed by boys. They can also actively challenge stereotypes by encouraging girls to take an interest in STEM subjects and boys to explore arts and caregiving roles, breaking down the idea that certain fields are "only for one gender."

Institutions can also provide training for teachers on gender sensitivity, helping them recognize and address their own biases. Schools should work to include diverse role models in their curricula, showcasing the



achievements of women and marginalized groups to inspire all students. Additionally, mentorship programs can be a powerful tool, pairing girls with female teachers or professionals who can guide and motivate them. Schools should also engage parents and communities, holding workshops or discussions to highlight the importance of education for girls and address cultural biases that may be holding them back. By taking these steps, institutions and teachers can help level the playing field, ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of their gender.

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