

Empowering Women's Education through National Digital University

Kishore K¹, A. Shyamala Devi²

^{1, 2}Department of Education, University of Madras, Chennai

Coreesponding author: kishorejodhpurkar2129@gmail.com

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ABSTARCT

Human resource is very essential for the development of a country. The activities and economic development of the country depend on the human resources. India today is the most populous country in terms of such human resources. But it is very unfortunate that India is not among the best countries in the world either economically or educationally. Reports, data and research findings reveal that even when women make up half of India's population, we are still underutilizing their human resources. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2023, India ranks 127 out of 146 countries surveyed overall. So, the government has taken various initiatives to bridge this gender gap. One of them is gender equality for women in higher education. According to the National Education Policy-2020, a National Digital University will be set up. A National Digital University about to launch with an aim to achieve 50 percent GER by 2030. So, the National Digital University will help immensely in increasing the percentage of female students' GER. This announcement is a huge boon for female students who want to pursue higher education in India. Because since the beginning of independent India, there has been a gap between male and female students who can enrol in higher education. Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the trends in enrolment of women in higher education institutions in India over the past five years and list out the reasons behind women's enrolment in higher education and how digital university online education can overcome these barriers in higher education. For this, the researcher followed descriptive methodology. Secondary data are obtained from various published and unpublished records, books, magazines and journals, both print and online and discussed how to increase the Gross Enrolment Ratio of female students in higher education through National Digital University.

Keywords: Gender Gab, Gross Enrolment Ratio, National Digital University.

INTRODUCTION

All the democratic countries of the world including India insist on gender equality especially in educational activities and do not accept any differences. Education is the mirage for many women those who are the backbone of the society. Women are excluded from various types of high-level activities due to decline or non-availability of academic knowledge. Various types

of data and reports show us that the position of women in higher education is very poor, especially comparing to men. The Kothari Commission recommended the National Education Policy, and the National Education Policy 2020 emphasize the education of girls and gives them importance. One of the suggestions of National Education Policy 2020 is, the online learning mode that can be offered through Digital University. It is true that National Digital University, the various women in India they can achieve higher education very easily in the upcoming future. Education improves the socio-economic status of women and gives them awareness in life (Azam, 1993). Women's empowerment and women's higher education are closely related. The reality is that opportunities must be given to the women in higher education to empower themselves. The contribution of men in society is as important as the contribution of women. If such importance is to be given to the society and not to stop only with the family housework and caring children, then women should be given proper higher education. Like men, women have critical thinking skills and analytical skills, so higher education system is very essential and necessary for women to improve and refine it. Also, higher education is necessary for women to manage their families, raise children, improve their economy and improve their social status in the family background and to get better job opportunities hence this article speaks about Empowering Women's Education through National Digital University.

GENDER INEQUALITY

Since independence, women have not equalled the number of men in economics, politics, leadership, and education in our country. Especially in India, the number of higher education institutions that can be led by women is very low. India's higher education institutions are led by an average of seven percent female leadership (Joseph & Joseph, 2022). This is due to the low percentage of women who can enrol in higher education. Although the percentage of female enrolment in higher education has gradually increased, it has not been equal to that of males. On the one hand, women have been facing social, family, and economic setbacks due to a lack of higher education. Similarly, there is a decrease in the Gross Domestic Income (GDI) by women. And it affects the overall development of India.

STATE WISE MALE AND FEMALE LITERACY RATE IN INDIA

In independent India, equality of education was provided for both male and female. But there exist a wide range of difference in the literacy rate between male and female from the beginning. According to 2011 census, we can see the differences in the literacy of male and female students in each state.

Table 3.1
State wise literacy rate of male and female in India

S.NO.	STATE	LITERACY	MALE	FEMALE	GENDER DIFFERENCE IN %
	India	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68
1	Kerala	94.00	96.11	92.07	4.04
2	Lakshadweep	91.85	95.56	87.95	7.61
3	Mizoram	91.33	93.35	89.27	4.08
4	Goa	88.70	92.65	84.66	7.99
5	Tripura	87.22	91.53	82.73	8.8
6	Daman and Diu	87.10	91.54	79.55	11.99
7	Andaman and Nicobar Islands	86.63	90.27	82.43	7.84
8	Delhi	86.21	90.94	80.76	10.18
9	Chandigarh	86.05	89.99	81.19	8.8
10	Puducherry	85.85	91.26	80.67	10.59
11	Himachal Pradesh	82.80	89.53	75.93	13.6
12	Maharashtra	82.34	88.38	75.87	12.51
13	Sikkim	81.42	86.55	75.61	10.94
14	Tamil Nadu	80.09	86.77	73.44	13.33
15	Nagaland	79.55	82.75	76.11	6.64
16	Uttarakhand	78.82	87.40	70.01	17.39
17	Gujarat	78.03	85.75	69.68	16.07
18	Manipur	76.94	83.58	70.26	13.32
19	West Bengal	76.26	81.69	70.54	11.15
20	Dadra and Nagar Haveli	76.24	85.17	64.32	20.85
21	Punjab	75.84	80.44	70.73	9.71
22	Haryana	75.55	84.06	65.94	18.12
23	Karnataka	75.36	82.47	68.08	14.39
24	Meghalaya	74.43	75.95	72.89	3.06
25	Orissa	72.87	81.59	64.01	17.58
26	Assam	72.19	77.85	66.27	11.58
27	Chhattisgarh	70.28	80.27	60.24	20.03
28	Madhya Pradesh	69.32	78.73	59.24	19.49
29	Uttar Pradesh	67.68	77.28	57.18	20.1
30	Jammu and Kashmir	67.16	76.75	56.43	20.32
31	Andhra Pradesh	67.02	74.88	59.15	15.73
32	Jharkhand	66.41	76.84	55.42	21.42
33	Rajasthan	66.11	79.19	52.12	27.07
34	Arunachal Pradesh	65.38	72.55	57.70	14.85
35	Bihar	61.80	71.20	51.50	19.7

(Literacy Rate of India - Population Census 2011, n.d.)

From the table 3.1, the 2011 population statistics shows that none of the states the literacy rate of women matches with the men. In India, Kerala has the highest number of female literates at 92.07% and Bihar has the lowest number of female literates at 51.50%.

ENROLMENT OF WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The enrolment details of the students are known through Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) for Education which is conducted by the Government of India every year. It provides the state wise enrolment details of students in education across India. The details of the students who can enrol in higher secondary education are known through the All-India Survey on School Education (AISSE), which can be conducted by the Indian government every year.

Table 4.1
Difference between the enrolment of male and female in higher education

YEAR	MALE (In Thousands)	FEMALE (In Thousands)	TOTAL (In Thousands)	PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE
1950-1951	157	17	174	10
1955-1956	252	43	295	14.6
1960-1961	468	89	557	16
1965-1966	849	218	1067	20.4
1970-1971	1563	391	1954	20
1975-1976	2131	595	2426	24.5
1980-1981	2003	749	2752	27.2
1985-1986	2512	1059	3571	29.6
1990-1991	2986	1439	4425	32.5
1995-1996	4235	2191	6426	34.10
2000-2001	4988	3012	8001	37.6
2005-2006	6562	4466	11028	40.5
2010-2011	16173	13010	29184	45
2015-2016	18594	15990	34584	46
2016-2017	18995	16710	35705	46.8
2017-2018	19200	17442	36642	47.6
2018-2019	19200	18200	37400	48.6
2019-2020	15060	14485	29545	49.02
2020-2021	15969	15077	31046	48.6

(Ministry of Education, Educational Statistics at Glance 2020-21)

From the table 4.1, Enrolment of female students in higher education in India since independence till date has been lower than that of male students. While the enrolment of female students has steadily increased every year, it has not kept pace with that of male students. A maximum of 49.02% female enrolment in higher education reached in the year 2019-2020. The reality is that even though the Indian government has launched various schemes for higher education of women, the enrolment is still not match with men.

GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO IN HIGHER EDUCATION (GER)

All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) provides state wise enrolment details and Gross Enrolment Ratio of students in education across India. The details of the students who can enrol

in higher education are known through the All-India Survey on Higher Education, which can be conducted by the Indian government every year.

Table 5.1**GER of female students in Higher Secondary Education and Higher Education**

S.NO.	YEAR	% OF FEMALE STUDENTS GER IN HIGHER SECONDARY EDUCATION	% OF FEMALE STUDENTS GER IN HIGHER EDUCATION	GENDER DIFFERENCE IN %
1	2016-2017	43%	23.8%	19.2%
2	2017-2018	48%	24.6%	23.4%
3	2018-2019	50%	25.5%	24.5%
4	2019-2020	50.8%	26.4%	24.4%
5	2020-2021	52.4%	27.9%	24.5%
				Average 23.20%

(Ministry of Education, Educational Statistics at Glance 2020-21 & UDISE+2020_21_Booklet, n.d.)

From table 5.1, shows the information about enrolment of female student in higher education in India based on various data and sources and how the actual situation varies from year to year. Also, it shows how the total enrolment ratio differs between higher secondary school education and higher education. In the last five years, the enrolment profile of female students in higher education's Gross Enrolment Rate shows us an average difference of 23.20%. Also, the Gross Enrolment Ratio of female students in each year shows that Higher Education Enrolment does not match with Higher Secondary School Enrolment.

THE OBSTACLES TO WOMEN'S ENROLMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

We can understand that the female students have been facing many problems towards enrolling in the higher education in India through the various data, reports, and research conclusions. Barriers to higher education remain the same problems for women in India. Here, we can sort out generalizable reasons from a variety of data, but there are many specific reasons for women to enrol in higher education. It should also be noted that most of the girls are unable to join higher education due to these reasons.

Growth of population, Economic barriers, Interventions of religion, Caste background, Dowry problems, Lack of Accessibility, Limited employment opportunities, Gender inequality, Family responsibilities, Lack of support from the family, Cultural barriers, Fear of sexual harassment, Maternal barriers, Social cultural backgrounds, Lack of sanitary facilities, Discriminatory approach in education, Family restrictions, Conservative mind-set, False perceptions, Mobility restrictions, Psychological barriers like low self-esteem and feeling intimidated by male competitors (Shetty M., 2019) & (Janaki, 2013)

Apart from these, most of the women are prevented from pursuing higher education due to the lack of educational institutions nearby. Due to the misunderstandings of the parents, they refuse to agree to send girls alone to educational institutions, which is also the biggest obstacle for girls pursue higher education. Also, rural women are reluctant to join higher education due to lack of language skills (Shetty M., 2019).

NATIONAL DIGITAL UNIVERSITY - NDU

National Education Policy-2020, India has introduced changes in previous education activities and suggested new education systems. One such innovation is the national digital university. One of the objectives of the national Digital University is to provide the necessary facilities for easy access and education through the Internet. As a pioneer in the state of Kerala in India, Kerala Digital University was established in 2020 and providing online education to various students through it. National Digital University will begin its operations in collaboration with government and private universities operating in India. The National Digital University will operate on 'the hub' and 'the spoke' model. That means MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) portals act as hub and Universities act as spokes (Kundal, 2023).

National Digital University will conduct courses for students through SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds). Samarth, IT and other administrative services will assist National Digital University in implementing the government (Goreja & Goreja, 2023).

National Digital University plans to offers flexible online learning through an academy and credit system. An example of flexibility is that a student who earns 50 percent of the credits through a university and attends another institution of higher education with the remaining credits often has a greater chance of graduating from that university. This means that, if a student registers in University of Madras and gets 50 percent credit, the University of Madras will award her a degree. Also, when a student enrolls in the National Digital University and acquires cumulative credit from different universities, the National Digital University will award her a degree, thus increasing the female student's learning rate and learning freedom (Luxmi, 2023).

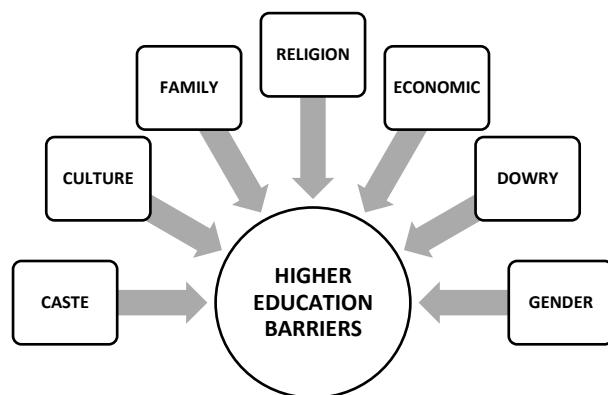
BENEFITS OF NATIONAL DIGITAL UNIVERSITY

- There are usually limited number of seats in private and government universities. But through National Digital University you can get unlimited seats from the same universities.

- National Digital University plans to provide various benefits to the students with the aim of increasing the overall employability of the country.
- It has fully contributed to the Digital India movement.
- The National Digital University allows full use of the online system for obtaining degrees in higher education. (Kundal, 2023)

EMPOWERING WOMEN'S EDUCATION THROUGH NATIONAL DIGITAL UNIVERSITY

The National Education Policy-2020 calls for the creation of India's first National Digital University (NDU) through the establishment of the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). The Government of India has announced that the National Digital University will be established by late 2023. Students in India, especially female students, will be greatly benefited by this digital university based on digital with online learning in near future (Gohain, 2022).



Online learning can break down all the barriers to the enrolment of higher education for women in India. This is because the online learning that can be provided through a national digital university is highly flexible. Online learning is accessible to female students from anywhere, which helps to reduce barriers to enrol in the higher education to a great extent.

The digital university fills the gap between these barriers to access to higher education and other innovative initiatives that address these barriers. It is a fact that female students can get benefits through digital university that cannot be achieved through any other initiative. We should note that the Global Gender Gap Report 2022 indicates that gender gaps in online enrolment have narrowed considerably compared to traditional education.

The online education system that can be provided through National Digital University provides the following benefits to female students. Access to a wider range of programs and courses offering, Provide better and higher education opportunities, Better convenience, More flexibility, The ability to learn at their own pace, It is easier to concentrate and participate,

Learn new technical skills, Reduce stress, Learn practical skills for the real world, Provide gender inclusion, Getting more confidence, Learning from top universities and the top mentors, Getting global peer network, Choosing preferred learning methodology, It's more cost effective than traditional education, Provide virtual collaboration opportunities and Provide multiple modes of communication (Gautam, 2021).

There is no doubt that this digital university and the online learning offered through it will be of great help to female in improving their academic knowledge and integrating themselves in real life. Higher education is essential for women to remove social barriers, family barriers and other mental barriers, so it is a great opportunity for women to improve themselves by simply absorbing higher education provided through national digital university in the way of online platform.

CONCLUSION

Women should be given equal value and power in society. If equal power and value are given, then every woman can lead their home and the community towards the path of development. Education, especially for women from disadvantaged communities and tribal women have the power to transform their future lives to a great extent. But unfortunately, some women in urban areas and women living in rural and hilly areas face various obstacles to pursue higher education. All those barriers can be addressed through the National Digital University. Education system in various developed countries is turning to online education and succeeding in it. So, there is no doubt that online education will be a huge social change for women. And it is also believed that enrolment of women may matches with men or increases through the National Digital University.

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