



MASSIVE OPEN ONLINE COURSES FOR ENHANCING EQUALITY IN EDUCATION AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN INDIA

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Abstract

According to a UNESCO Institute of Statistics in 2018, 258 million children and youth are out of school out of which 132 million are girls. According to the Census 2011, the literacy rate in India is 74.04 %, the male literacy rate is 82.14 per cent and 65.46 per cent women's are literate. Gender inequality has been experienced in the educational institution from decades. The main areas that are taken into account are gender influence on women's education and empowerment, factors influencing women's education and empowerment, how MOOC can help to reduce gender inequality by providing access to education and empower women's by overcoming gender disparity issues. Samples of 120 females were taken using a non-probability sampling method. The data was collected with the help of the questionnaire and interview. The path of gender equality in India is full of potholes. Education is the key to empower women's and gender equality. It can change the attitude of society to accept the equal status of women that only can clear the path for gender equality. Some reasons which hinder women education and empowerment are women were not allowed to travel long distances, lack of toilet facilities in school forces them to drop out from school, irregularity in school and colleges because they have to accomplish their gender roles like household work, taking care of their siblings etc. MOOC provide great opportunity to access quality content without any biases which ultimately empower women with knowledge. Women can access to "the bulk of knowledge" which is economical from anywhere, at any time with the help of MOOC which also provides better job opportunities ultimately leads to women empowerment.

Keywords: Gender equality, Gender roles MOOC, Women empowerment



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Introduction

India is the most populous democracy and home for 30 per cent of the world total illiterate population out of which 70 per cent are women. About one-fourth of the Indians are illiterate. The literacy rate of India is 74.04%, the male literacy rate is 82.14 per cent and female literacy rate is 65.46 per cent according to Census 2011. According to a UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2018) 258 million children and youth are out of school out of which 132 million are girls. In India 13.46 million children are out of school in 2006 which is decreased to 6 million in 2014 (Source: RI-IMRB Surveys, 2009 and 2014). The Right to Education Act which provides "free and compulsory education to all the children for the age group 6 to 14 years" as a fundamental right has been instrumental in the reduction of the number of out of school children. This data shows that India lags in women's education despite many initiatives taken by the



government of India like Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, CBSE Udaan Scheme, National Scheme of incentives to girls for secondary education. Education is the most powerful tool to bring change in the world. It is the key to success, illuminates a person's thinking, develops human personality and prepares people for challenges of life.

Global equality is a global priority for UNESCO which also reflects in their sustainable development goals (SDG) as SDG 4 aims to “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” and SDG 5 to “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.”

Gender disparity and discrimination has been experienced in educational institutions and begins with access to schooling. According to “European institute for gender equality”, gender disparity refers to “differences in women's and men's access to resources, status and well-being, which usually favour men and are often institutionalised through the law, justice and social norms”. Educating the mother has a greater impact on children education than their father's education. It has been common in patriarchic society in India that males were given preferences concerning opportunities, power, authority and females have to withstand differential attitude of being inferior. Males are regarded as means of security and females are regarded as a liability. They were considered as “Praya Dhan” which indicate that girls are a liability to parents who belong to her in-laws. According to a UN report as a result of sex selection which is prohibited in India “4.6 lakh girls are missing at birth from 2013 to 2017” to prefers a male child than a female child. One in four Indian women are subjected to child marriage as per The National Family Health Survey 2015-16. In the 21st century on one hand India is on its path to becoming a superpower on another evil like gender discrimination plagues the society.

Objectives

1. To study the factors causing gender inequality in education.
2. To study the influence of gender in women education and empowerment.
3. To understand how MOOC can be helpful for women in accessing education.
4. To understand how MOOC can help to overcome the factors which affect women education and empowerment.

Methodology

A survey was conducted on 120 females using non-probability sampling. Convenience sampling method was used and data of women who are familiar with MOOC was collected with the help of a questionnaire and telephonic interview.

Delimitations of study

This study limits to 120 women participants of age 16 to 35 who have attended at least one MOOC. This Survey was conducted only on a limited number of participants and restricted to Haryana and Delhi i.e. 2 states of northern India. Conveniently available samples were considered for this research due to COVID pandemic. Most of the participants belong to the higher and middle class.

Factors causing gender inequality in education

Multiple and diverse connections exist between gender discrimination and education. Women are denied the human right to education all around the world. The factors causing gender inequality in education are -

1. Illiterate parents: Uneducated parents believe that girls have to do their household chores hence there is no need for educating females as it will not help them in implementing household responsibility. They were not able to understand the importance of educating a girl.
2. Traditional viewpoint: Most of the Indian families are patriarchic who also believe that educating a male is equal



- to family income as females will get married and have to leave their maternal house. They also believe that rather than spending money on female education it's better to save it for their marriage.
3. Poverty: Due to paucity of money for person's basic need parents prioritise their need because of which male education was given preference as they think that if their son will not get educated then he will be unable to get a good job opportunity. They believe that educating a son is necessary for securing their family future.
 4. Lack of proper school facilities: Researches have indicated that many female students drop out due to lack of appropriate school infrastructure facilities like proper sanitation facility. About 15 per cent of girls drop out of school due to lack of proper sanitation facility and long travel distances of school.
 5. Discriminatory treatment: Research indicated that girls and women usually experience discriminatory treatment among the marginalised, deprived and socio-economic backward sections. They face discriminatory treatment in respect of getting medical and health facilities, accessing education, employment opportunities, opportunity to assist family business, property, nutritious diet (good quality food is given to males and simple food for females). The study conducted by "International Centre for Research on Women" (ICRW) on "gender roles in India" found that one in three men surveyed do not allow their wives to wear the clothes of their choice.
 6. Criminal and violence act: Women and girls have experienced crime and violence act like verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, rape, acid attacks, female infanticide, domestic violence, discriminatory treatment child trafficking. These acts have an effect on women physical and psychological health. It usually leads to a drop out of females from an educational institution. In a study by ICRW on gender roles, more than 50 per cent of women surveyed reported that they faced some kind of violence during their lifetime.
 7. Child Marriage: In 1929 government passed a law banning child marriage but as per The National Family Health Survey 2015-16, one in four Indian women are subjected to child marriage i.e. below 18 year age females get married which forbid them from the acquisition of education.

Influence of gender discrimination on women's education and empowerment

Gender roles are "the set of societal norms dictating the types of behaviours which are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for people based on their sex." A different attitude towards different sex has existed in India from generations which affect the lives of both sexes. Research shows that gender discrimination mostly favours men in many realms. However Indian constitution grant equal right to men and female but still the gender disparity continues in India including home, workplace, educational institution.

1. Lack of equal opportunities in school: Discrimination begins from schooling where girls were encouraged to opt subjects which are related to house and community like home science and physical science mostly considered for boys. Gender discrimination restricts opportunities for girls to prove themselves.
2. High dropout rates of girl students: According to studies, 23 per cent of adolescent girls drop out from school due to lack of sanitation facility and 30 per cent of marginalised women are sexually assaulted to access public toilet. In absence of necessities, females have to face many challenges. According to the report, Children in India (2018) released by the ministry of programme implementation stated that "57% of girls drop out of school by class XI".
3. Poor Attendance: Family constraint like Household responsibilities are considered as women role, girls should not travel long distances, less-availability of female teachers (girls should be taught by female teachers) in secondary school education are some reasons of poor attendance of secondary school girls.



4. Limited job opportunities: 9 to 5 job is considered good for females. Females were restricted for joining the army, late-night jobs and overnight jobs. Women have to consider their family viewpoint for considering any job opportunity and kind of job she can join. They need the permission of husband and family for pursuing a job. Most of the women were not allowed to travel long distances and stay away from home due to safety reasons and the traditional viewpoint of our society which ultimately hamper their empowerment and restrict their freedom.
5. Secondary consideration of women education in the family: Women belong to higher economic class and higher middle class enjoy great opportunities regarding their education and job but women of the lower middle class and low class are facing great discrimination and very restricted opportunities. With limited resources, these people prefer to educate and empower their son than a girl. Females of these class especially depend on scholarships, sponsorship.

MOOC: Massive open online course

MOOC (Massive open online courses) became a new trend in the world education system which are free to access using the internet from any time, anywhere at anyplace and any number of times. MOOC are facilitated by leading practitioners in the field which provide quality and authorise content. There is no restriction on enrolment in these courses regarding numbers, eligibility, physical presence. It provides a life-long learning opportunity and needs a minimal fee for providing a certificate. It is a self-learning course, based on the principle of connectivism. It provides a great opportunity for peer learning. MOOC is very economical as compared to other online courses and offline courses.

India also initiates a MOOC platform called SWAYAM (Study webs of Active-Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) which provide 3,605 courses with 203 partnering institutes in which 16 million students are already enrolled. It provides self-paced international courses from class 9th till postgraduate. It is designed to achieve “the three cardinal principles of education policy i.e. access, equity and quality.” There are many other MOOC platforms like edX, Coursera, Khan Academy, iversity etc who provided a huge number of courses developed by some renowned educational institutions of the world.

How MOOC help in enhancing equality in education and empower women

MOOC can help in overcoming various boundaries pulled by gender discrimination. Around 90 per cent of the women in this survey considered MOOC as an efficient and effective tool which can provide access and reduce gender inequality in education. Gender discrimination restricts access to educational opportunity for women due to family constraints and traditional viewpoints of our society. They face different challenges to access educational opportunities which can be catered with the help of MOOC.

1. MOOC provide easy access to quality education: About 70 per cent of women accepted that MOOC is easy to access and provide quality content but 30 per cent argues that it is not easy to access to a quality MOOC easily. They also mention that MOOCs are mostly available in international languages and a few MOOCs were developed in their native language which restricts them to avail the benefits.
2. No discrimination: MOOC is self-paced promote self-learning and there is minimal interaction between instructor and students. Peer interaction took place and no discrimination was faced by the participants during the course. 90 % of the participants of the survey accepted that they did not face any gender discrimination but about 10 per cent of women mentioned that while interacting with peers they feel marginalised and discriminated.



3. Economical: MOOC can be considered as a boon for those women who are deprived of the educational opportunities due to lack of financial resources. It provides a great source of learning material. MOOCs are free online courses only those who need certificate need to pay the minimal charges. 80 per cent of participants considered MOOC as economical but others were not cleared and mention that they were not aware of a certificate of which courses are considered by the authority so they have to invest in different courses which amplify the amount.
4. No restriction of time and place: Women who were restricted due to long-distance travelling, household responsibilities and other family constraints can use MOOC as an effective learning opportunity. It provides qualitative content and drops outs can also continue their studies with it. 65 per cent of women considered MOOC as helpful for time and place constraint 25 per cent mention that it cannot be considered as a good choice as with fixed time at least they are regular in their studies and other did not found it helpful at all.
5. Provide an equal opportunity of education: MOOC did not discriminate and provide equal opportunity for education but it is still in lagging in developing content in native languages. 72 per cent of women participant mentioned that it cannot be considered that MOOC is providing equal opportunity and equity in education. They mention that 18 languages are included in the eighth schedule of the Indian constitution and MOOCs are mostly developed in international languages. It provides a good opportunity for education for those who are comfortable with those languages but cannot be considered as an equal opportunity provider for education in India.
6. Good job opportunities: Only 40 per cent of women participants of the survey considered MOOC can provide a good job opportunity but the rest did not found it helpful for a better job opportunity.

Conclusion

“You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation.”— **Brigham Young**

Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that everyone has the right to education. The education system of India is loaded with gender inequalities which are regarded as the barrier for the attainment of the right to education. The prevalence of inequalities in access, quality and completion of the education in India are still an issue which is not fully resolved. The major factors causing gender inequality in education are poverty, illiterate parents, child marriage, discriminatory treatment for girls, tradition viewpoints, lack of school facilities, criminal and violent acts. Because of these factors gender discrimination influence women education and empowerment as it restricts their access to equal opportunities in school, poor attendance, high rate of girls dropout especially at the secondary stage, limited job opportunities, and secondary consideration of women education. With access to schooling, the problem of gender inequality begins in the education system and continues to higher education institutions. MOOC is a new trend in the world education system which provide access to educational opportunities from anywhere at any time. MOOC is an economical, self-paced course which helps to overcome time, place and monetary constraint. Females who have family constraints like household responsibilities, travel restriction etc can easily manage their learning with the help of MOOC. MOOC supports cooperative learning and reduces gender discrimination to minimal. It cannot be considered that MOOC can be a solution for gender inequality in education but it can help to overcome the influence of gender discrimination up to some extent as it provides access to quality educational opportunities. Education is the great mean of empowering women with knowledge, skills, self-confidence and attaining equal status by participating in the development process of society.



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