

CHALLENGES OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION IN INDIA'S INTERNATIONALIZATION JOURNEY

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Introduction:

The internationalization of education has transformed learning systems worldwide, fostering academic mobility, cross-border collaborations, and globally recognized curricula. However, while India embraces these changes, significant disparities persist in women's access to quality education, particularly in the context of internationalization. Despite progressive policies and global commitments to gender equality, structural, cultural, and economic barriers continue to hinder women's participation in internationalized education systems.

India has made notable progress in female literacy, with enrollment rates improving at primary and secondary levels (UNESCO, 2022). Yet, higher education and global academic opportunities remain disproportionately inaccessible to women, especially from rural and marginalized communities. The internationalization of education, often centered on urban elite institutions, risks exacerbating gender inequalities if not consciously designed to be inclusive.

This paper examines the key challenges women face in India's internationalization of education, analyzing socio-cultural constraints, economic barriers, digital divides, and policy gaps. It argues that without gender-responsive strategies, internationalization may reinforce existing disparities rather than bridge them.

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Need for Gender-Inclusive Internationalization:

The internationalization of education promises enhanced employability, intercultural competence, and global networking opportunities. However, women in India encounter systemic obstacles that limit their participation in these benefits. According to the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2021), women constitute only 49% of higher education enrollments, with far fewer accessing international exchange programs or globally recognized institutions.

Why Focus on Women's Education in Internationalization?

1. Economic Empowerment – Global education improves career prospects, yet women face wage gaps and occupational segregation (World Bank, 2020).
2. Social Mobility – International exposure can challenge regressive gender norms but remains restricted for many Indian women.

3. Sustainable Development – SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) mandate inclusive education, yet implementation lags.
4. Digital and Skill Gaps – Women are underrepresented in STEM and digital education, critical for global competitiveness (NITI Aayog, 2023).

Without deliberate interventions, internationalization may only benefit a privileged few, leaving women—particularly from rural, tribal, and low-income backgrounds—further behind.

Challenges Faced by Women in Internationalized Education:

1. Socio-Cultural Barriers

- Gender Stereotypes & Familial Restrictions— Many families prioritize male education, viewing women's roles as confined to domestic spheres (NCERT, 2019).
- Safety Concerns – Fear of harassment deters women from studying abroad or migrating for education (Ministry of Education, 2022).
- Early Marriages – In some regions, girls drop out due to societal pressure to marry early (UNICEF, 2021).

2. Economic Constraints

- High Costs of Global Education – International programs, travel, and tuition fees are often unaffordable for women from low-income families.
- Limited Scholarships – Few gender-targeted funding options exist for women pursuing global education (UGC Report, 2022).

3. Digital Divide

- Unequal Access to Online Learning – Only 31% of rural Indian women use the internet, restricting access to digital international courses (ITU, 2023).
- Lack of Tech Literacy – Societal biases discourage women from STEM fields, limiting their participation in digital education.

4. Institutional and Policy Gaps

- Lack of Gender-Sensitive Curricula – Few Indian institutions integrate global competencies with gender-responsive pedagogy.
- Underrepresentation in Leadership – Women remain a minority in academic leadership, affecting policy decisions (AISHE, 2021).

5. Visa and Mobility Restrictions

- Stringent Visa Norms – Women face additional scrutiny when applying for study visas, especially if unmarried (MHA, 2023).
- Limited Support Networks – Few mentorship programs assist women in navigating global education pathways.

Conclusion & Recommendations:

India's internationalization of education cannot be truly transformative unless it addresses gender disparities. While global academic integration offers immense opportunities, systemic barriers prevent women from fully participating. To create an equitable system, the following measures are essential:

Policy Interventions:

- Gender-Quotas in International Programs – Reserve seats for women in exchange programs and scholarships.
- Safe Mobility Initiatives – Strengthen support systems for women studying abroad (e.g., mentorship, legal aid).

Institutional Reforms:

- Gender-Inclusive Digital Education – Expand affordable online learning with women-centric content.
- Curriculum Localization – Blend global competencies with regional gender perspectives.

Societal Change :

- Awareness Campaigns – Challenge stereotypes through community engagement.
- Corporate Partnerships – Encourage firms to fund women's global education.

Without these interventions, internationalization risks becoming another exclusionary system. By embedding gender equity into global education strategies, India can ensure that women are not just beneficiaries but leaders in the knowledge economy.

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