

PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS TOWARDS GIRLS' HIGHER EDUCATION

Naznin Akhtar Ansari

M.Ed., Email- nazninakhtar038@gmail.com

Dr. Shakera Parveen

Associate Professor, Dept. Of Education and Training MANUU

Email- shakera4manuu@gmail.com

Paper Received On: 20 JAN 2024

Peer Reviewed On: 28 FEB 2024

Published On: 01 MAR 2024

Abstract

Investigators carried out research to know the perceptions of teachers towards girls' higher education in the Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal. The research aimed to explore teachers' views on the advantages, barriers, and influencing factors of girls' higher education, and also comparing the perceptions of male and female teachers towards higher education of girls. descriptive survey method was adopted for this study, data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 36 colleges and university teachers. Statistical techniques such as mean, standard deviation, percentages, and t-test were used for analysis.

The findings revealed that 6% of teachers demonstrated a high level of positive perceptions, 86% exhibited an average level, and 8% reflected a low level of perceptions towards the advantages of girls' higher education. Teachers' perceptions on barriers as influencing factors are largely average. Furthermore, the comparison between male and female teachers' perceptions reveals no statistically significant difference ($t\text{-value} = 1.035$; $p\text{-value} = 0.308$).

The results highlighted that while teachers generally recognize the importance of girls' higher education, many hold only average perceptions on benefits and challenges. This suggests the need for awareness programs and professional training to enhance teachers' understanding of the important role of girls' higher education in societal development. The study marked the importance of creating a supportive academic environment that encourages equitable educational opportunities for girls and addresses the barriers they face.

Keywords: girls higher education, Teachers' Perceptions, Barriers, cultural and socio economic Factors and Advantages of girls higher education

Introduction:

Education is a powerful tool that shapes individuals and contributes to societal development. In the context of gender equity, girls' higher education holds immense potential to transform not only individual lives but also communities and nations. Higher education enables girls to

acquire advanced knowledge, develop critical thinking skills, and enhances their socioeconomic status. It plays a crucial role in empowering women to actively participate in the workforce, make informed decisions, and contribute to nation-building.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, introduced in India, places significant emphasis on achieving gender parity in education. It highlights the importance of equitable access to quality education for all, particularly girls, through various measures such as the establishment of gender inclusion funds, scholarships, and the promotion of gender-sensitive teaching practices. NEP 2020 recognizes girls' higher education in addressing social inequalities and fostering an inclusive learning environment.

Despite such progressive policies, barriers to girls' higher education persists in the form of societal stereotypes, financial constraints, safety concerns, and cultural biases. Teachers, as key stakeholders in the education system, plays a vital role in influencing attitudes and promoting the importance of education among students and their families. Their perceptions significantly impact the encouragement, guidance, and support provided to girls pursuing higher education. This study focused on understanding the perceptions of teachers towards girls' higher education in the Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal. It aimed to explore their views on the advantages, barriers, and factors influencing girls' higher education while also analyzing the differences in perceptions between male and female teachers towards higher education of girls. Understanding teachers' perceptions is essential for identifying gaps and implementing strategies to foster a gender-inclusive educational environment in align with NEP 2020.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by highlighting the role of educators in addressing challenges faced by girls in accessing higher education. Furthermore, the study seeks to provide insights for policymakers and stakeholders to design initiatives that promote equitable access to education and empower girls to achieve their potential.

Literature Review:

Sharma and Singh (2022) explored the perceptions of teachers towards girls' higher education in urban and rural areas of India. The study revealed that urban teachers had a more positive outlook towards the importance of girls' education compared to rural teachers, who were often influenced by traditional gender norms. The study emphasized the need for teacher training programs to address these disparities.

Gupta and Choudhary (2021) examined the role of teachers' perceptions in promoting higher education for girls in economically weaker sections. They found that teachers who viewed

education as a tool for empowerment were more likely to encourage girls to pursue higher education, despite societal and economic barriers. This highlighted the direct correlation between teachers' perceptions and students' academic aspirations.

Mishra (2020) analyzed teachers' attitudes towards girls' education and their understanding of barriers faced by female students. The study showed that while many teachers acknowledged financial and cultural constraints, only a few actively worked to address them through supportive practices. Mishra recommended gender-sensitivity training for teachers to enhance their awareness and intervention strategies.

Banerjee and Das (2019) focused on the differences in male and female teachers' perceptions of girls' education. The study found no significant differences in their overall attitudes, but female teachers were more empathetic towards addressing challenges faced by female students, such as safety concerns and family restrictions.

These studies collectively reflect the importance of positive teacher perceptions in overcoming barriers to girls' higher education. Teachers' attitudes significantly influence not only students' academic achievements but also their motivation and confidence to pursue higher education. Addressing gaps in teachers' understanding through awareness and training programs is essential to foster a more inclusive and supportive educational environment.

Methodology:

The study adopted a descriptive survey method to explore the perceptions of teachers towards girls' higher education. This research design was selected to gather detailed insights into teachers' views on the advantages, barriers, and factors influencing girls' higher education, as well as to compare the perceptions of male and female teachers.

Population and Sample:

The population for this study consisted of teachers from colleges and universities in the Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal. A total of 36 teachers, both male and female, were selected as the sample for the study. The sample size was chosen to provide a representative view of the perceptions of teachers from diverse backgrounds and academic disciplines.

Sampling Technique:

A simple random sampling technique was adopted to select the participants. This method ensured that each teacher in the target population had an equal chance of being selected, reducing biasedness and increasing the reliability and generalizability of the findings.

Data Collection Method:

Data were collected using the scale- teachers' perceptions towards higher education of girls. This scale covers 30 items with 3 dimensions in it. Each dimension has 10 items. Reliability and validity of the tool was taken into account before administering the tool.

Statistical Techniques:

The collected data were analyzed using the following statistical techniques:

Mean: To determine the average perceptions of teachers towards different aspects of girls' higher education.

Standard Deviation (SD): To measure the variability or dispersion of teachers' perceptions towards higher education of girls.

Percentage: To calculate the proportion of teachers with high, average, or low levels of perceptions towards the various factors.

t-test: To assess the significance of difference in perceptions of male and female teachers towards higher education of girls. A p-value of less than 0.05 would indicate a statistically significant difference in perceptions.

Ethical Considerations:

The study was conducted following ethical guidelines to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured that their responses would be used only for research purposes and confidentiality would be maintained.

Findings:

The findings of the study revealed teachers' perceptions towards girls' higher education in the Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal. The analysis of the data were collected from the 36 teachers, including both male and female participants, highlighting their views on the advantages, barriers, and factors influencing girls' higher education.

1. Perception of Teachers towards the Advantages of Girls' Higher Education

6% of teachers showed a high level of perceptions regarding the advantages of girls' higher education. These teachers emphasized the importance of education in empowering girls and contributing to societal development.

86% of teachers had an average level of perceptions, recognizing the value of higher education for girls but acknowledging certain challenges and limitations that might hinder its full potential.

8% of teachers expressed a low level of perceptions towards the advantages of girls' higher education, highlighting lack of awareness about the broader benefits for individuals and society.

2. Perceptions of Teachers towards Barriers to Girls' Higher Education:

57% of teachers perceived high-level towards barriers to girls' higher education. This group pointed out factors such as cultural norms, financial constraints, safety concerns, and the undervaluing of girls' education.

36% of teachers considered the barriers to be average, acknowledging some challenges but also recognizing efforts being made to address these issues.

7% of teachers perceived low-level barriers, which could indicate an overestimation of the accessibility of higher education for girls or a lack of awareness about the challenges they face.

3. Perception of Teachers towards Factors Influencing Girls' Higher Education:

Teachers' perceptions of factors influencing girls' higher education were largely average. Many teachers identified factors such as parental support, government policies, availability of scholarships, and institutional infrastructure as important influences. However, a lack of comprehensive teacher training in gender-sensitive approaches may have hindered teachers from fully recognizing other factors, such as societal norms or safety concerns, that impact girls' educational opportunities.

4. Comparison of Perceptions Between Male and Female Teachers towards higher education of girls:

The analysis of the comparison between male and female teachers revealed that there was no significant difference in their perceptions towards girls' higher education.

The results stated that, $t\text{-value} = 1.035$, and $p\text{-value} = 0.308$ indicated that both male and female teachers shared similar views regarding the advantages, barriers, and factors influencing girls' higher education, and the difference between their perceptions was not statistically significant.

A majority of teachers had an average perceptions of the advantages, barriers, and factors influencing girls' higher education.

The high perceptions was predominantly seen in their recognition of the benefits of girls' higher education.

There were moderate concerns regarding barriers, including cultural and financial factors.

The study revealed no significant difference in the perceptions of male and female teachers towards higher education of girls.

These findings highlighted the need for enhanced awareness and professional development to support teachers in fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for girls' higher education.

Discussion:

The findings of this study provided important insights into teachers' perceptions towards girls' higher education in Paschim Bardhaman, West Bengal. In the context of the study's objectives, the discussion will interpret these findings and compare them with the existing literature on the topic.

Perceptions towards the Advantages of Girls' Higher Education:

A significant majority of teachers (86%) had an average perceptions regarding the advantages of girls' higher education. This findings aligns with previous studies, such as those by Sharma and Gupta (2021), which indicated that while teachers recognize the importance of girls' higher education, they may not fully realize the broader societal and personal benefits. The relatively small percentage (6%) of teachers who expressed a high-level perceptions suggested that there is a gap in recognizing girls' education. It is possible that teachers, particularly in rural or semi-urban areas, may still hold reservations due to cultural biases or lack of awareness about the wider implications of educating girls.

A limited number of teachers (8%) had a low-level perceptions of the advantages of girls' higher education, which is concerning. This could reflect the persistence of traditional views that prioritize boys' education over girls'. Such perceptions may stem from long-standing gender norms and stereotypes prevalent in societies. Teachers play an essential role in challenging these norms, and efforts to promote gender-sensitive training for educators are crucial to ensure that their perceptions are more aligned with the broader goals of gender equity in education.

Perception Towards Barriers to Girls' Higher Education:

The findings revealed that 57% of teachers perceived high-level barriers to girls' higher education, with factors such as cultural stereotypes, financial constraints, and concerns about safety emerging as significant obstacles. This is consistent with previous research by Mishra (2020) and Banerjee and Das (2019), which highlighted the various structural and societal challenges that hinder girls' educational progress. The relatively high percentage of teachers recognizing these barriers reflects an awareness of the complex and multifaceted nature of gender inequality in education.

However, 36% of teachers viewed the barriers as average, acknowledging challenges but also recognizing that some efforts are being made to address them, such as scholarships, government policies, and awareness programs. This finding suggests that while barriers persist, there is a growing recognition of efforts to reduce these obstacles, especially at the policy level, such as initiatives under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which calls for gender-sensitive curricula and infrastructure improvements.

The 7% of teachers who perceived low-level barriers may be less tuned to the specific challenges girls face or may have a more optimistic outlook on the educational opportunities available to girls. This could also reflect regional differences in the perceived severity of barriers, where teachers in urban settings or institutions with greater resources may be less aware of the difficulties encountered by girls in rural areas.

Perceptions towards Factors Influencing Girls' Higher Education:

Teachers' perceptions regarding factors influencing girls' higher education were predominantly average, indicating that many teachers are aware of various contributing factors such as parental support, scholarships, and government policies. However, there was a lack of strong emphasis on other critical factors, such as the role of gender norms, safety concerns, and the sociocultural environment, which significantly affect girls' educational outcomes. This could indicate the need for more comprehensive training for teachers to better understand and address these influencing factors.

In comparison to other studies (e.g., Gupta and Choudhary, 2021), which found that teachers who viewed education as a tool for empowerment were more likely to provide support and encouragement, this study suggests that while teachers recognize certain influencing factors, they may lack to take proactive steps to address them.

Comparison of Perceptions Between Male and Female Teachers towards higher education of girls:

The study found no significant difference between the perceptions of male and female teachers, as stated by the obtained t-value (1.035) and p-value (0.308). This result is somewhat surprising, given that studies such as those by Banerjee and Das (2019) suggested that female teachers may have more empathetic views toward the challenges girls face. The lack of significant difference could indicate that both male and female teachers, in this particular sample, are equally concerned about gender equality in education and are similarly influenced by societal and institutional factors.

This result may also reflect the increasing awareness among male teachers about the importance of supporting girls' education, as gender equality has become a prominent focus in educational policy and practice, especially with the introduction of NEP 2020. It is possible that both male and female teachers have a similar understanding of the barriers and advantages of girls' education due to the shared emphasis on gender equity in recent educational reforms.

Implications for Policy and Practice:

The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers and educational institutions. While teachers generally recognize the advantages and barriers associated with girls' higher education, there is a need for more professional development programs to further raise awareness and address gender biases. These programs should focus on helping teachers understand the underlying cultural and social barriers that prevent girls from pursuing higher education and providing them with the tools to create more inclusive classrooms.

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of implementing gender-sensitive policies, such as those outlined in NEP 2020, which encourages educational institutions to provide equal opportunities for girls. By further engaging teachers in training and sensitization programs, education systems can work towards reducing the barriers to girls' higher education and ultimately contribute to achieving gender parity in education.

Conclusion:

The study on teachers' perceptions towards girls' higher education in the Paschim Bardhaman district of West Bengal offers valuable insights into the attitudes and beliefs of teachers regarding the opportunities and challenges that girls face in pursuing higher education. The findings suggested that while teachers generally perceive the advantages of girls' higher education, the level of awareness and the recognition of barriers vary among them.

A majority of teachers (86%) hold an average perception of the benefits of girls' higher education, with some teachers recognizing its potential but still facing challenges in fully understanding its wider societal and personal benefits. While 6% of teachers show a high level of perceptions, reflecting a deeper understanding of the benefits, it is concerning that 8% have a low-level perceptions, possibly indicating cultural biases or awareness needed for them.

In terms of barriers to girls' higher education, 57% of teachers acknowledged high-level obstacles, including financial constraints, cultural norms, and safety concerns. However, 36% of teachers perceived barriers to be average, suggesting that while challenges are acknowledged, some progress has been made. The study also found that there is no significant

difference in the perceptions of male and female teachers, highlighting the need for more focused efforts in raising awareness among teachers.

The study reflected on the importance of professional development programs for teachers that focus on gender equality and the removal of cultural and societal barriers to girls' education. As per the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, there is a clear emphasis on creating an inclusive educational environment that promotes the education of girls. However, to fully realize the policy's objectives, teachers must be actively engaged in gender-sensitive training and sensitization initiatives.

Through continued awareness programs and policy support, the education system can work towards achieving gender parity in higher education, ultimately contributing to the empowerment of girls and the broader socioeconomic development of society.

References

- Agarwal, R., & Kumar, V. (2017). *Educational Barriers for Girls in Rural India: A Study of Teachers' Perceptions*. *Journal of Education and Development*, 10(2), 65-79.
- Banerjee, S., & Das, S. (2019). *Barriers to Girls' Education: A Study of Social and Cultural Influences in India*. *Journal of Educational Research*, 45(2), 123-138.
- Bhat, S. (2018). *Gender Inequality and the Education System in India*. *International Journal of Social Sciences*, 16(3), 201-215.
- Chatterjee, A., & Roy, R. (2020). *Teachers' Perspectives on Gender and Education: A Case Study in West Bengal*. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, 23(4), 109-120.
- Gupta, R., & Choudhary, P. (2021). *Teachers' Perceptions and Gender Sensitivity in Education: An Indian Perspective*. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 28(4), 219-227.
- Gupta, S. (2019). *A Study on the Impact of Gender Sensitivity Training in Teacher Education*. *Journal of Gender Studies in Education*, 34(2), 88-95.
- Mishra, A. (2020). *Challenges and Barriers in Higher Education for Girls: An Analysis of Rural India*. *Education and Society Journal*, 32(1), 75-90.
- Mohan, D. (2021). *The Role of Teachers in Promoting Girls' Education in Rural Areas of India*. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 19(1), 42-58.
- National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT). (2020). *National Education Policy 2020: A New Vision for Education in India*. Government of India.
- Reddy, N., & Patel, R. (2019). *Perceptions of Teachers Towards Girls' Education in Rural Areas of India*. *Journal of Indian Education*, 47(3), 142-158.
- Sharma, A., & Gupta, K. (2021). *Perception of Educators Towards Gender Equality in Higher Education: A Study in Rural Settings*. *Journal of Gender and Education Studies*, 15(3), 150-165.
- Soni, S., & Verma, H. (2018). *Education and Empowerment of Women in India: A Study of Government Policies and their Impact on Rural Girls*. *Indian Journal of Educational Research*, 22(1), 99-115.
- Yadav, R., & Saini, P. (2019). *Factors Affecting Girls' Access to Higher Education: A Teacher's Perspective*. *International Journal of Women's Education*, 12(2), 55-67.
- Yadav, S., & Kumar, N. (2020). *Gender-based Perceptions of Teachers in Secondary Education: A Case Study from Bihar*. *Indian Journal of Education and Development*, 25(1), 41-55.
- Zaman, M., & Rahman, M. (2018). *The Role of Teachers in Bridging Gender Gaps in Education: A Review of Policy and Practice*. *Journal of Education and Gender Studies*, 28(2), 67-80.