

Chapter 8

Obstacles in Female School Education: The Importance of Online Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

The importance of female education is gaining popularity among individuals, societies, and nations. They are getting full support from their families and society members as well. Government has also initiated many schemes to encourage female education, but still girls face many obstacles in their attainment of school education. The present study aims to bring to the fore the problems faced by girls while pursuing school education. A survey was conducted in which data were collected from 20 students and 10 parents with the help of interview schedules, and a qualitative study was undertaken. The results show that the main challenges faced by girls relate to adverse financial condition of their families, anomalies in school infrastructure, and lack of awareness of various government schemes. Moreover, online learning due to COVID-19 has added to these troubles. These results offer useful policy implications and can go a long way in removing the constraints in the way of female education.

INTRODUCTION

Education is the transfer of information from one person to the other through spoken words, gestures, audio or visual medium. According to EU Commission (2016), education refers to any act or experience that has a formative effect on an individual's mind, character, or physical ability. In its technical sense, education is the formal process by which society, through schools, colleges, universities and other institutions, deliberately transmits its cultural heritage and its accumulated knowledge, values and skills

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to the next generation (UNESCO). It is vital for the overall well being of the people as it makes one knowledgeable, independent and capable of taking care of oneself. Not only at the individual level, but it also plays a dominant role in laying down the foundation of a society and in determining economic development of an economy. Education increases stock of skills and productive knowledge embodied in people, and educated people create new ideas. There is wide acceptance in the literature that education contributes considerably to economic growth and development of nations (DiCorrado et al., 2015; Pegkas, 2014; and Hanushek, 2013). But, many individuals are denied access to education across the globe on grounds of region, religion, gender, caste, etc. but the bigotry on the basis of one's sex is the most prevalent one. Female education is all the more important as it not only adds to economic development, but also brings about equality in the society and improves quality of life of masses. It leads to better health and education levels of their children, and also lower mortality rates (Kumar & Sangeeta, 2013). Women with higher levels of educational attainment almost universally have fewer children than women with lower levels of education (Economic Growth in Developing Countries: Education Proves Key, 2008). In addition, female education promotes economic growth (Salatin & Shaaeri, 2015; Self & Grabowski, 2004; and Benavot, 1989) and it leads to their empowerment (Sundaram et al., 2014; Yadav et al., 2011; and Al Riyami et al., 2004). Research conducted in a variety of countries and regions has established that educating girls is one of the most cost-effective ways of spurring development. Further, studies have shown that giving women more access to education, markets, new technology, and greater control over household resources, mostly translates into greater well-being for the household. Indeed, when women are educated and empowered, the benefits are enormous. Researchers in various studies concluded that gender inequality in education greatly hampers economic growth of nations (Ali 2015; Chaudhry, 2007; and Klasen, 2002). Importance of education in general and female education in particular cannot be highlighted more for developing countries, where dearth of skilled human resource is still a major obstacle in the path of accelerated growth of the economy. Besides, equal access to education is one of the basic human rights which everyone should get but, gender discrimination in education is a global phenomenon.

Gender Discrimination in Education

The word 'gender' is generally looked at from different perspectives and is therefore used in more than one sense. Biologically-oriented theories attribute gender differences to the different biological and genetic roles played by males and females while sociological theories focus on the socio-structural determinants of gender (Hameed & Shukri, 2014). In simple terms, generally it is used to mean 'sex' of a person i.e. male, female, etc. but, actually it means the different roles, activities and responsibilities assigned to men and women on the basis of their perceived association with masculinity or femininity respectively. The term gender is becoming more common to describe biological variation traditionally assigned to sex and this has led to the misuse of this term (Torgrimson & Minson, 2005). According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, sex (noun) is the sum of the structural, functional, and sometimes behavioural characteristics of organisms that distinguish males and females. It is a natural phenomenon acquired at birth and cannot be changed, but gender is a supposed notion evolving with wisdom and experience and therefore, it can change with acquirement of more knowledge. Gender can be understood as a framework encompassing the expected behaviour from men and women as per socially prescribed guidelines and in this framework, women have been assigned lower status. This inequality in status of female's vis-a-vis males, is termed as gender discrimination, and generates quite harmful psychologi-

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