Factors Influencing Girls' Education in Nepal: History and Perceptions of Participants

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the various ways in which gender discrimination reveals itself within the realm of education for girls, both within the school environment and at home. Additionally, the study seeks to identify the various factors that influence gender-related disparities in girls' education and examine the history of schooling for girls. In our society, socio-cultural norms and values that are biased towards gender are deeply ingrained, and this has prompted the Nepal government to initiate several measures aimed at fostering a gender-friendly environment within schools. Despite these interventions, the study finds that achieving gender parity in education remains elusive. As such, the study has prioritized examining how gender-based societal influences impede girls' education. The study is based on field data collected through direct interaction with participants to obtain insights grounded in real-world experiences.

Keywords: *Education, Gender, Discrimination, Equality, Factors*

INTRODUCTION

The importance of girls' education cannot be overstated. Various individuals and organizations have consistently emphasized the significance of educating girls, not just for their personal growth but also for the betterment of their families, communities, countries, and the world at large (Hinton-Smith et al., 2018). According to the Center for Global Development, education is the most crucial factor that leads to an independent life for girls as they grow up. Without education, they will be unable to contribute to the development of their country. Thus, education forms the foundation of a country's progress.

Moreover, education is the key source of gender balance and plays a vital role in the all-round development of girls. The International Literacy Year 1991's slogan, "Let us educate women, let us educate a nation", is still relevant and famous today. The Government of Nepal is dedicated to providing quality education to all school-age children, recognizing the significance of education not just for human beings in general but for girls in particular. However, despite the efforts made, a gap between male/boys' and female/girls' education still needs to be addressed. In Nepal, several school-age children are still not enrolled in school, according to the Flash Report by the Department of Education in 2012. It is a concerning issue as the Central Bureau of Statistics report in the same year shows that about 35% of the population above six years of age are still illiterate. Moreover, these statistics reveal a gender disparity in education, with girls being less likely to receive an education than boys.

Although the Education for All (EFA) initiative in 2015 aimed to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, girls and women are still being discriminated against based on gender when it comes to schooling. In Nepal, girls are frequently expected to prioritize household chores over their studies, which leaves them with insufficient time to study at home. Consequently, the literacy rate among females in Nepal is lower than that of males. As per the Central Bureau of Statistics report of 2011, the literacy rate among males was reported at 75.1%, whereas the female literacy rate was 57.4%. The lack of progress in promoting gender issues in the education system is a cause for concern. Therefore, it is essential to identify the gender-influencing factors that are affecting girls' education and develop effective strategies to tackle them.

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This evidence clearly explains the study's methodology and context (Wiersma, 1995). After conducting an in-depth reading and related literature review, it can be observed that Nepal's government has been actively focusing on promoting girls' education. Several studies have emphasized the need to prioritize girls' education, and as a result, numerous programs and policies have been implemented to promote it. Additionally, various treaties and conventions have been established, and programs have been designed and implemented at the international, national, and local levels. Although several of these programs target specific groups, girls still face significant educational barriers (Lonchar, 2022).

The study aims to answer reasonable questions concerning factors that keep girls from educational opportunities and influence girls' education in Nepal. Therefore, the researcher conducted comprehensive research to identify the factors influencing girls' education. The study is crucial for schools' teachers, head teachers, students, and societies as it will provide valuable insights and information that can be used to improve girls' access to education in Nepal.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

To explore the factors that influence girls' education.

To analyze the history and participants' perception of girls' education in Nepal.

Research Questions

This study aims to thoroughly investigate the current state of girls' education in Nepal. Specifically, the study explores and analyses various factors influencing and shaping girls' schooling experiences in the country. The research will collect and analyze data from multiple sources to understand the challenges and opportunities in promoting girls' education in Nepal. Therefore, this study is based on the following research questions.

How do family dynamics affect girls' education in Nepal?

What are the barriers to girls' education in Nepal?

How have historical events affected girls' education in Nepal?

What impacts girls' education in Nepal?

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Orientation

The Capability Approach, developed by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen, offers a thorough theoretical framework for comprehending the variables affecting girls' education in Nepal, with a focus on historical variables and participant perspectives. The capability approach, which was developed in the 1980s in a series of publications on quality of life, poverty, inequality, and justice by Sen (1980), Sen and Williams (1982), and Nussbaum (1988), provides a normative framework for evaluating well-being, social arrangements or institutions, and public policy.

The Capability Approach is a framework that focuses on the freedoms and capabilities of individuals to live a life they value. In the context of girls' education in Nepal, this approach considers how historical factors such as socio-cultural norms, political structures, and economic conditions have affected the ability of girls to access and benefit from education over time. By examining historical trends and policy decisions, researchers can identify how various factors such as gender discrimination, poverty, caste-based inequalities, and conflict have either limited or improved girls' ability to pursue education. Furthermore, the Capability Approach emphasizes the importance of understanding individuals' subjective experiences and perceptions. When studying girls' education in Nepal, researchers can explore how girls, their families, teachers, community members, and policymakers perceive and value education. It involves examining cultural beliefs, attitudes towards gender roles, expectations concerning girls' education, and aspirations for the future. By incorporating diverse

perspectives, researchers can uncover the complex interplay of social norms, values, and aspirations that shape girls' educational opportunities and choices.

The Capability Approach emphasizes the significance of enhancing the abilities and agency of individuals through policy interventions and social change. In the Nepalese context, this means addressing structural barriers such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, gender-based violence, and discriminatory practices that prevent girls from accessing education. It also means promoting capabilities essential for girls' educational empowerment, which includes access to quality schooling, health services, economic opportunities, and social support networks. By focusing on expanding girls' capabilities and agency, policymakers and practitioners can create an enabling environment that empowers girls to overcome obstacles and pursue education, leading to fulfilling lives. The Capability Approach provides a comprehensive theoretical lens for understanding the factors influencing girls' education in Nepal by integrating historical analysis with insights into participants' perceptions and agency. By focusing on individuals' freedoms and capabilities, this approach highlights the importance of addressing structural inequalities and empowering girls to access and benefit from education, ultimately contributing to broader social development and human flourishing.

Theoretical Framework

To comprehensively understand the factors that influence girls' education in Nepal, we can use several interconnected lenses, including Feminist Theory, Critical Theory, and Socio-Ecological Model. Feminist Theory provides a critical perspective on gender disparities in education and highlights how historical and societal factors have perpetuated inequalities between boys and girls. By examining the historical context of girls' education in Nepal through a feminist lens, researchers can identify entrenched patriarchal structures, cultural norms, and discriminatory practices that have marginalized girls and restricted their access to education. This perspective emphasizes the importance of challenging traditional gender roles and advocating for gender-sensitive policies and interventions to promote girls' education and empowerment.
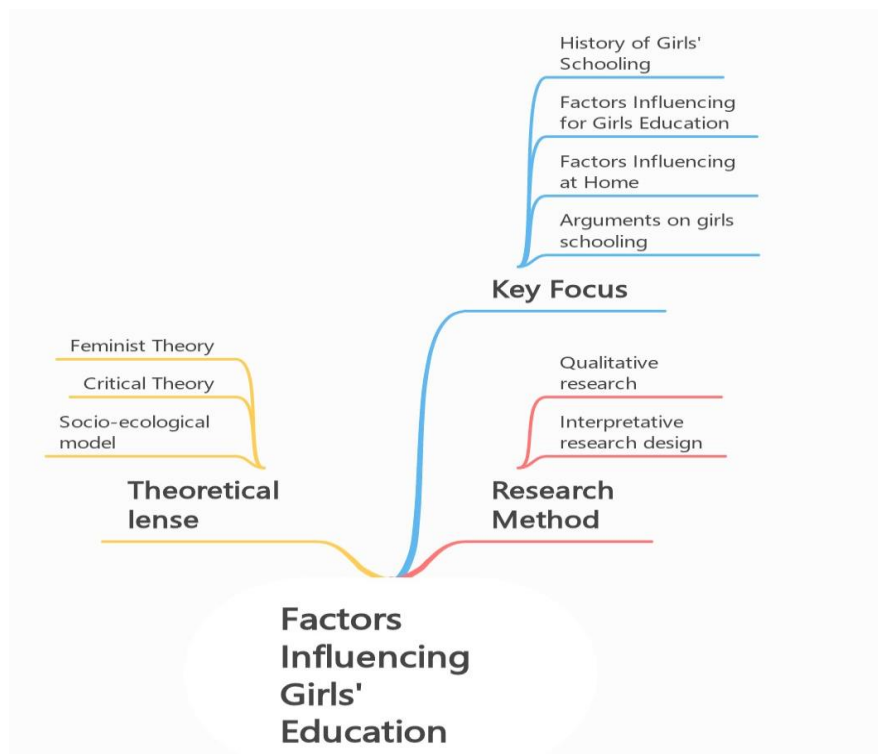

Figure 1: Theoretical framework

Critical Theory offers a framework for analyzing power dynamics and social injustices affecting educational opportunities and outcomes. In the context of Nepal, Critical Theorists can examine how historical events like political instability, conflicts, and colonization have influenced educational policies and practices, primarily related to gender. By investigating power relationships and structural inequalities, researchers can identify systemic barriers that hinder girls' education, such as poverty, caste-based discrimination, remote geography, and lack of infrastructure. Furthermore, Critical Theory promotes reflexivity and amplifies the voices of marginalized groups, including girls, parents, teachers, and community members. This approach challenges dominant narratives and advocates for transformative change.

The Socio-Ecological Model provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the various factors that affect girls' education across different levels of society. These levels include the individual, interpersonal, community, institutional, and societal. In Nepal, researchers can explore how factors such as family socio-economic status, parental attitudes, and girls' aspirations interact with interpersonal dynamics, community norms, school environments, and broader societal structures to facilitate or hinder girls' access to and retention in education. Researchers can develop targeted interventions and policy recommendations by analyzing these factors to address barriers to girls' education at multiple levels, promoting sustainable change. By integrating insights from Feminist Theory, Critical Theory, and the Socio-Ecological Model, researchers can develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for studying the factors influencing girls' education in Nepal. This framework provides a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural, political, and economic dynamics shaping girls' educational experiences. It informs the design of evidence-based interventions to promote gender equality and inclusive education in Nepal and beyond.

Research Design

A research design is a conceptual framework within which research is carried out. Similarly, research design means measures of collecting, organizing, analyzing, interpreting, and reporting data in research (Creswell, 2003). This qualitative research takes place in a natural setting. Bryman (2009) says that a research design provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data. A choice of research design reflects the priority given to a range of dimensions of the research process. The study aims to investigate the factors that influence girls' education in Nepal. It will use a qualitative research design to explore historical factors and participants' perceptions. Qualitative methods are highly effective in examining complicated social phenomena and capturing the intricate viewpoints of individuals within their cultural and historical contexts. The study utilized an interpretive qualitative research design.

Study Site, Population, and Sample

The study aims to gather comprehensive insights on the research topic by using purposive sampling to select participants. The chosen participants will include girls currently enrolled in school, their parents/guardians, teachers, policymakers, and education experts. The sampling criteria will consider factors such as geographic location, socio-economic status, educational attainment, and gender to ensure that a diverse range of perspectives is represented. In this section, the researcher presents the research site, sample population, sample type, and number:

Table1. Sampling and sample type

S.N.	Participants	Type	Number of participants	Used tools
1	Teachers	Headteachers	2	
2	Teachers	subject teachers	4	Interview and observation
3	Students	Girls	10	
4	Parents	Father and mother	4	

The researcher selected a sample population and research site for the Gorkha district of Palungtar Municipality Ward Seven. Similarly, the researcher selected head teachers (2), teachers (4), students (10), and parents (4)" There are no rules for sample in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose

of investigation" (Patton, 1990,). Primary data were collected from five schools in Palungtar Municipality. The above-given population and research site were selected based on purposive sampling.

Research Tools and Techniques

The research tools consist of interviews and observation guidelines for the data collection procedure.

Interview

The study aims to explore individuals' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions regarding girls' education in Nepal. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with participants to collect data. The interviews followed a set of guidelines developed based on the study objectives. Audio recordings of the interviews were made only with the participants' consent, and the transcriptions were analyzed verbatim. The interview is the primary tool for data collection.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

To facilitate a collective exploration and discussion of key themes related to girls' education, we were conducting Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with groups of participants. These FGDs provided a platform for individuals with diverse backgrounds and viewpoints to come together and exchange ideas, opinions, and experiences. Through these discussions, we hope to identify shared concerns and priorities that enable us to develop effective strategies to improve girls' education. The FGDs also help us better understand girls' challenges in accessing education and identify potential solutions to overcome these challenges.

Documentary Analysis

The review aims to gain a deeper understanding of the historical and policy contexts that have shaped the evolution of girls' education in Nepal over time. A comprehensive analysis of historical documents, policy reports, and educational literature was conducted to achieve this. This analysis will help to contextualize the findings within broader historical and policy frameworks and shed light on the challenges and opportunities that have influenced girls' education in Nepal. Through this review, we hope to gain insights to inform future policies and interventions to improve girls' education in the country.

Observation

The observation technique refers to a research method that involves observing and recording the physical setting and environment where a particular population is located. This technique is commonly used in social sciences to gather data on human behavior and interactions in natural settings. By capturing the physical environment, researchers can gain insight into the context and conditions that shape people's actions and experiences. Additionally, this technique can provide valuable information about the relationships between individuals, groups, and their surroundings.

Ethical Considerations

The study strictly follows ethical guidelines for research that involves human participants. For voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity, informed consent was obtained from each participant for the study. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and without consequences. The research findings were reported accurately and respectfully, preserving the dignity and privacy of the participants.

Validity and Reliability

Specific measures were taken to ensure the study's validity and reliability. These include triangulation of data sources, member checking, and peer probing. Triangulation involves using multiple data collection methods and sources to corroborate findings and enhance the credibility of interpretations. Member checking consists of verifying findings with participants to ensure accuracy and validity. Peer debriefing involves consulting with colleagues to critically evaluate research processes and interpretations, thereby enhancing the accuracy and trustworthiness of the study.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to scrutinize and evaluate the transcribed interviews and FGDs. It allowed us to identify and explore recurring patterns, themes, and narratives directly or indirectly related to the various factors influencing girls' education. The analysis was conducted systematically and rigorously to ensure that all critical information was captured and interpreted accurately. The themes identified through the study were carefully coded and organized into different categories, which enabled us to analyze the key findings. This categorization was done based on the similarities and differences in the themes and how they relate to the different factors affecting girls' education. This approach provides a more in-depth understanding of the issues and enables us to draw meaningful conclusions that inform policy and practice.

Historical Analysis

The aim is to analyze historical data and documents to identify the significant events, policies, and socio-cultural factors that have influenced the educational opportunities available to girls in Nepal throughout history. This analysis provides valuable insights into the historical context of girls' education and helps to understand today's challenges and opportunities.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings and discussion cover the History of Girls' Schooling, Factors Influencing Girls' Education, factors of education at home, and research arguments.

History of Girls' Schooling

According to Ghate (1972), history is a scientific study and a chronicle of our past. Similarly, history helps us understand the past and makes the present better for humans. History and past events are crucial for everyone to enhance their current life. In Nepal's history of girls' education, the first formal school was founded in 1853, although its primary purpose was to educate children from affluent households who did not have females. With the emergence of democracy in Nepal in 1951, a more comprehensive range of people could attend classes. The Education Plan 1971 guaranteed the nation's educational advancement (CBS, 2011). Not many girls attended school after that.

In Nepal, girls' education has been prioritized for thirty years—the Education Regulation of 1992 mandates that all public elementary schools hire at least one female teacher. At the August 1997 high-level meeting in Nagarkot, Nepal, the secretary and senior education authorities presented this recommendation. This high-level discussion determined that more female teachers should be allocated to rural schools to enhance girls' education (CERID, 1999). The effective initiatives of the government of Nepal, such as the recruitment of female teachers in schools, have encouraged girls to pursue education.

Factors Influencing for Girls Education

This section discusses the data/information related to the selected population (headteachers, teachers, girls' students, and parents) and their school gender issues. The terms "feminism" and "manhood" indicate the opposite and socially inequitable categories of gender (Luitel, 2008). Nonetheless, gender discrimination has occurred in the studied region, whether intentionally or accidentally. Given the history of prejudice in Nepal, gender discrimination is not a recent problem (Bista, 2006). Gender discrimination has been viewed as mild and stereotypical, especially in educational institutions. For example, males and girls play in different groups and have different seating arrangements. These exercises make it clear that they had preconceived notions about gender. In any case, they see these as part of their duties as a girl. Regardless of the lack of training on gender issues, the study area's instructors had positive views on gender issues and girls' education. They are working hard to reduce discrimination based on gender in the classroom.

> *One of the teachers explained that they treated all students equally, regardless of gender, and taught reading and writing equally to both girls and boys. However, many girls are burdened with household responsibilities*

and fieldwork during farming seasons, leading to fatigue. As a result, almost no girls can arrive at school on time during these times. This information was gathered from field data in 2023.

The part of the teacher is a very significant and requiring factor for girls' schooling (Oppong et al., 2022). While staying in the field, researchers interviewed one schooling girl about her schooling process, and she replied as follows:

My father enrolled me at the age of eight years, but my younger brother was at the age of five. However, I could not attend school regularly because of household and field workload. My brother kept regularity in school so he could pass the exam, but I could not pass the exam (Interview recorded, June 2023).

These different (failed and passed) statuses have exhibited girls' educational status. In this regard, Joshi (2021) says that girls face several challenges in getting a proper education, especially in rural areas; it is tough for girls to step out of their houses to get an appropriate education. Due to gender bias in society, she was unable to attend school regularly compared to boys. In this reference, "feminism emphasizes understanding gender inequality in literacy and education (Mathur, 2001). Girls are extremely busy in household work and fieldwork. They spend all their time on physical hard work. Furthermore, parents are still unaware of the importance of education for their daughters.

Factors Influencing Girls' Education at Home

Children's schooling primarily starts at home, and family is the source of learning. Education is vital to women's socio-economic and political development (Shetty & Hans, 2019). With education, the world has become a better place to live in. However, stereotype gender bias is linked to our socio-cultural beliefs. For instance, a well-known and enduring saying states that a Nepali couple begins to consider having a son on the first day of their marriage: "Let it be later, let it be a son" (Sanjel, 2001). Thus, the above-given lines present the gender discrimination status for girls at home. Regarding gender issues, one girl said,

When I was five years old, my father died. Then my mother married again. She brought me here. Now I am studying in class seven. My stepfather is forcing me to leave school due to his gender-biased mind. He does not understand the importance of girls' education and prefers household and fieldwork for girls (Interview recorded, June 2023).

Parents ' biased minds never hampered the girls' education. Both cultural practices and societal patriarchal ideals contribute to this kind of inferior position inside the family (Davis, 2023). According to this source, societal norms and conventions influence parents' attitudes and behaviours, defining the roles those boys and girls play (UNESCO, 2005). Thus, it might be the cause of the sample school of girls who were softly gender discriminated at home. Unlike the parents in the past generation, the educated parents in the new generation are liberal on gender issues or prefer girls' schooling. However, parents with low educational backgrounds, particularly some mothers, did not value their daughters' education and saw daughters as nothing more than possessions, whether or not they pursued an education. Researchers come across a woman with a conservative mindset while gathering data. At that time, researchers found her argument based on social belief, and her words are as follows:

I believe daughters are liberated up until they can read and write. This helps them for self-help in the future. If the daughter is more educated, then there will be a problem, firstly, in arranging her marriage and secondly in taking care of her home and family, especially her father-in-law and mother-in-law. They should be skilled homemakers (Interview recorded, June 2023).

According to our socio-cultural beliefs, daughters are not encouraged to gain an advanced level of education because they are usually concerned with household tasks. Regarding this, the significant factors that are responsible for affecting girl child education can be a low-income family background, religious isolation, disability, early marriage, and gender-driven violence against women's status and roles (Joshi, 2021). They can, therefore, manage the house with more remarkable ability. Moreover, they believe that women are weaker than men on both mental and physical levels. Conservative social views are embedded in our culture in this way. Therefore, education is the only effective way to lessen these social assumptions.

Researcher Argument

> Gender discrimination is mainly responsible for girls' low access to education.

> Due to gender influence, a family cannot make girls more educated as compared to boys in our society.

> Still, the stereotype of gender disparity is noticed in schools.

CONCLUSION

Drawing from the previously examined and construed field data and information, I have concluded that educating girls is unavoidable. Human progress requires education, and everyone has the fundamental right to an education (Kumar & Anita, 2012). Every youngster, male or female, should have access to an education. Not all girls are sent to school because of the family chores. However, because of the gender-biased mindset, some parents routinely send their sons to school but not their girls.

Improvements must be made in all aspects to deliver an excellent education to girls. Parents need to be made aware of girls' schooling. Similarly, they could be less work-loaded. Gender-friendly training is essential for teachers to create a gender-friendly environment in school so that girls can learn regularly and enjoy themselves fully. Therefore, schools must organize gender awareness programs for parents to increase participation in girls' schools, an essential development aspect. Until and unless equal participation of both boys and girls in education is ensured, the prosperity and growth needed to create a developed Nepal cannot be enhanced. NGOs and governments have made a few initiatives to establish a gender-neutral learning environment for females. Our procedures do not support gender equality. As a result, Nepali non-governmental and governmental organizations had to be actively involved in raising gender awareness.

Limitations of the Study

There are some limitations of this study. This study was conducted in the Gorkha district of Palungtar Municipality, Word No- 7, just before three weeks of Covid 19. All participants (two school head teachers, four teachers, ten girls, and four parents) were from the hilly part but not from other parts of Nepal. Subsequently, the result of this study might not be generalized among the entire schooling population of girls in Nepal. Thus, the study's result might differ based on the participants' gender experience.

Implications of the Study

This study is essential in the gender issues sector of girls' education in Nepal. This study is qualitative, and it generates several opportunities for additional research regarding gender issues. This study's result will be helpful to the Nepalese government and other NGOs for gender issues in girls' education. Similarly, this study will uncover the actuality of gender awareness and attitudes towards girls' education. This study also raises the skill level, imparts ample knowledge, and shifts the perspectives of girls' education without gender bias. This study will play a key role in picturing gender issues status in school and at home for girls. Based on the study, gender specialists, educationists, and policymakers can extend policies and programs to create a gender-friendly environment at school and home.

Acknowledgment

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