

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE, ECONOMICS & MANAGEMENT

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**GENDER DISPARITY IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IN INDIA: A CHALLENGE FOR INCLUSIVE GROWTH**

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**ABSTRACT**

*For inclusive growth education is the most important instrument to enhance human capabilities and to achieve the desired objectives of socio-economic development. It is one of most powerful instrument known for reducing poverty and inequality and laying the basis for sustained economic growth. Women education has assumed special significance in the context of country's planned development. In spite of concerted efforts to improve the enrolment of girls and provide education for them, their educational status is still far from satisfactory. Female enrolment in educational institutions is low as compared to males and dropout rates amongst girls are very high. The present study is to analyse the status of female education and gender disparity in elementary education in India and also to see the impact of increase in number of female teachers, infrastructural facilities and public expenditure on enrolment of girls during the last two decades at elementary level.*

**KEYWORDS**

Elementary Education, Female Education, Inclusive Growth and Gender Disparity.

**1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Inclusive growth which is a broad and multidimensional concept is not merely linked with poverty reduction but also with enlargement of opportunity, capability, access, equality and security of people. It implies the participation of all sectors and regions of the society in the growth process and equitable distribution of growth benefits to every section of society. The Eleventh Five Year plan said that a key element for the strategy of inclusive growth must be to provide the mass of our people access to basic facilities such as health, education, clean drinking water etc. and the government at different levels have to ensure the provision of these services. But despite the various efforts, inequities in our economy still exist and education sector of our economy is also not an exception.

Education is a key input in human resource development and is essential for country's economic growth and development. It is one of most powerful instrument known for reducing poverty and inequality and laying the basis for sustained economic growth. In addition, it plays a very crucial role in securing economic and social progress and improving income distribution (Ozturk, 2001). Moreover, education is essential for the construction of globally competitive economies and democratic societies combined with macroeconomic policies. It is a key for creating, applying and disseminating new ideas and technologies which in turn increase labour productivity. Education builds human capabilities which are important for individual to reflect, make choices, seek a voice in the society and enjoy a better life (Bruns, et al. 2005).

Elementary education constitutes a very important part of the entire structure of education because it is the time when a way of life begins. Primary school environment provides the child with the first-hand experience of group of life outside the family. The education which he receives at school provides the foundation for his harmonious development. Sound elementary education gives a fillip to sound secondary and higher education (Pathania, & Pathania, 2006). The elementary education is divided into two stages - Primary and Upper Primary education. Primary education includes the classes I to V and covers children in the age groups of 6-11 whereas, Upper primary covers classes VI to VIII and includes the children of 11-14 age groups (Govinda and Bandyopadhyay, 2008).

Female literacy is considered to be the most sensitive index of social development because it is indirectly but positively related to lower fertility rates, lower population growth rates, higher age at marriage, higher life expectancy and a greater participation by women in modern sector of economy (Rani, 1993). Education for a girl means that as a human they will be able to exercise their rights to participate in political and economic decision making in the community as well as in the household. It empowers women to take control of their life and create opportunities and choices to improve their conditions as well as that of their families. Hence, educating girl offers extraordinary social and economic benefit to current and future generation.

Schooling has innumerable benefits and yet vast majority of Indian children especially girls are deprived of these. Despite the fact that the social gains of women education are much larger than the private gains, the gender gap in education exist because those who bear the private costs of investing in girls education do not receive the full benefits of their investments. Despite aggregate improvement in education level, glaring disparities in elementary education continue to prevail. There are huge gender and social disparities in access to education at elementary level. Though, various measures are undertaken by the government and local bodies to reduce the inequality in education, the condition of girl education is still grim and there is gender disparity at all level of education (Vaid, 2004).

Equality of opportunity of access to education is necessity if more women are to become the agent of change. In 1986, The National Policy on Education (NPE) especially emphasised the necessity of reorienting education to promote women equality (Manjrekar, 2003). NPE (1986) and its Programme of Action (revised in 1992) gives education a mandate to work for women's equality and empowerment. The effort in that document attempted not only to provide equality of educational opportunity, but to transform the entire content and process of education for achieving gender equality and a realignment of gender roles, to make them more equitable and harmonious (Jain, 2003). Recent assessment shows that girl's participation in schooling has improved significantly during the last 10-15 years. However the Global Monitoring Report of UNESCO on progress towards Education for All (EFA) goals considers the progress to be far from satisfactory and

declares the country at risk of not achieving the goal of gender parity and equality. Though Government of India has put forward a number of schemes such as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary level (NPEGEL), Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyaya (KGBV) and Mahila Samakhya (MS) for bringing girls to school and holding them there, still the gap between male and female literacy persist.

## 1.2 LITERACY RATE IN INDIA

Since Independence, India began its educational journey with a serious handicapped as only around 18 per cent of adults possessed basic literacy skills (Table 1). Out of these only 8.86 per cent of female were literate as compared to the 27.16 per cent of the literate male. However, over the last six decades there has been impressive growth in literacy in India and the male-female gap in literacy rate has constantly fallen since 1991.

**TABLE 1: GENDER GAP IN LITERACY RATE IN INDIA (1951 to 2011) (Per cent)**

Year	Crude Literacy Rate			Male-Female Gap in literacy Rate
	Total	Male	Female	
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	65.38	75.85	54.16	21.70
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

Source: Census of India, 2001 & 2011.

During the last decade both male and female literacy rate were increasing. The female literacy has increased from 54.16 per cent in 2001 to 65.46 per cent in 2011 whereas the male literacy has increased from 75.85 per cent to 82.14 per cent during the same year. This increased in the female literacy has reduces the male-female gap from 21.70 per cent in 2001 to 16.68 per cent in 2011. Though, the gap in male-female literacy has declined, still the number of illiterate woman is high as compare to the total illiteracy in India.

## 1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has been undertaken to evaluate the educational level of girls at elementary stage. The emphasis on literacy and elementary education is intentional because these are the foundation of education system. In the light of above problems the specific objectives are:

1. To analyse the status of female education and gender disparity in elementary education in India during the last two decades.
2. To see the impact of female teachers, infrastructural facilities and public expenditure on enrolment of girls at elementary level during the last two decades.

## 1.4 GROWTH OF EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Enrolment of students is a measure of immediate attainment in education, more enrolment means greater opportunities for entitlements. Enrolment as an indicator of attainment is used massively in the form of its different variants namely Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), Net Enrolment Ratio (NER), Attendance rate and so on (Jha, *et al.* 2008). Out of the different variants, GER is considered as a good measure of attainment of education which is one of the measures of the flow aspects of educational attainment of the children.

Gross Enrolment Ratio is defined as the percentage of enrolment in the elementary classes (I-VIII) to the estimated child population in the age group of 6 to 14 years. It can sometimes be more than 100 per cent if there is large number of under-age and over-age students in the school.

The growth rate of the GER at elementary level is shown in Table 2. During the decade of 90s, the GER in primary and upper primary education level has come down from 100.2 per cent and 62.8 per cent in 1991-92 to 95.7 per cent and 58.6 per cent in 2000-01 respectively. However, growth in enrolment in decade of 90s was sluggish and uneven. This was mainly true in the case of boys, though some improvement is visible in the case of girls. The low growth in enrolment during the decade of 90s (era of economic reform) might be attributed to the adoption of 'Structural Adjustment Programme' by the states. It was well recognized that the share of education in the budgets of most of the states government has declined significantly over the years, as structural adjustment policies have devoted low priority to social sector like education. The per-pupil expenditure on education especially by the less developed states, has also declined, this led to quantitative and qualitative impact on education (Jha *et al.* 2008).

**TABLE 2: GROWTH OF GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL (1991-92 TO 2009-10) (Per cent)**

Year	Elementary					
	Primary			Upper Primary		
	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls
1991-92	100.2	111.8	86.9	62.8	75.1	49.6
1995-96	88.6	97.7	79.4	59.3	67.8	49.8
2000-01	95.7	104.9	85.9	58.6	66.7	49.9
2001-02	96.3	105.3	86.9	60.2	67.8	52.1
2005-06	109.4	112.8	105.8	71.0	75.2	66.4
2009-10*	115.5	115.6	115.4	81.5	84.5	78.3

Note: \* Provisional

Source: Education in India and Selected Educational Statistic, various years, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi

The growth of GER has improved since 2000 in both primary and upper primary level especially after the launch of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in 2001-02. The above Table shows that GER in both primary and upper primary education level during the decade of 2000s has increased from 96.3 per cent and 60.2 per cent in 2001-02 to 115.47 per cent and 81.52 per cent in 2009-10 respectively. Increased in the growth of GER of girls in both primary and upper primary level was higher than the increase in growth of boys. This increased in the enrolment was attributed to a number of centrally sponsored schemes such as recruitment of local teachers, increasing proximity of schools and nutritional support schemes like Mid-Day Meal scheme in schools to encourage enrolment of children in schools. Unlike the progress in enrolment during the last decades, the trends in retention and quality were not very encouraging. Drop-out was decreasing at both boys and girls at level of elementary education during the reform period but the declining trend of drop-out rate of boys was faster than the girls. Table 3 shows the drop-out rate at elementary stage which is defined as the percentage of students who drop-out from a given level of education in a given school years. In total (combination of boys and girls) the drop-out rate at elementary level declined from 69.37 per cent to in 1991-92 to 53.67 per cent in 2000-01. Within this drop-out rate of boys was declining faster than the girls during the same period. During the decade of 2000s the opposite was happening. The girls drop-out was falling faster than the boys. Though dropout rates at the elementary level has decreased over the recent years but they are still relatively very high and 42.39 per cent of children were drop-out from the school in the year 2009-10 without completing 8 years of schooling.



TABLE 3: DROP-OUT RATES AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL (1991-92 TO 2009-10) (Per cent)

Year	Elementary Level (I-VIII)		
	Boys	Girls	Total
1991-92	68.0	58.6	69.4
1995-96	54.3	59.5	56.6
2000-01	52.9	57.9	53.6
2001-02	52.9	56.9	54.6
2005-06	48.7	49.0	48.8
2009-10*	40.6	44.4	42.4

Note: \* Provisional

**Source:** Education in India and Selected Educational Statistic, various years, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi  
Gender Parity Index (GPI) which is also one of the indicators for defining the gender gap is shown in Table 4. Gender Parity Index is calculated by dividing the gross enrolment ratio of girls with gross enrolment ratio of boys at the given level of education. It is used to measure the progress towards gender equality in education. The GPI is a socio-economic index usually designed to measure the relative access to education of males and females. When GPI shows a value equal to one at any level of education, it shows that there is no gender disparity at that level and learning opportunities are available for girls equally to that of boys (SES, 2004-05). GPI at elementary education level has improved continuously during the reform period in India. Its value has increased from 0.71 per cent in 1990-91 to 0.82 per cent in 1999-2000. Since the introduction of SSA during the early period of 2000s the value of GPI has increased rapidly and reached to the level of 0.96 in the year 2009-10.

TABLE 4: GENDER PARITY INDEX (GPI) AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL (1990-91 TO 2009-10) (Per cent)

Year	Elementary Level (I-VIII)
1990-91	0.71
1995-96	0.80
1999-00	0.82
2001-02	0.81
2005-06	0.92
2009-10*	0.96

Note: \* Provisional

**Source:** Education in India and Selected Educational Statistic, various years, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi  
In spite of many policies and several steps taken by the government, the gender disparities is still persist at the elementary education because of various socio-cultural, economic, educational and religious factors. The major factors which are responsible for gender disparity are parental motivation for son's education, early marriage, poverty, nature of occupation by parents, child labour, higher cost for education, lack of infrastructure, less number of female teachers, long distance to school and religious factors.

## 1.5 DATA SOURCES AND METHODOLOGY

The study has used time-series data covering the period from 1991-92 to 2009-10. The variables used in the study have been collected from different secondary sources. These are collected from Census of India, Education in India and Selected Educational Statistics, Ministry of Human Resource Development and Analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education in India, Ministry of Human Resource Development.

To analyse the relative importance of Number of Schools, Number of Female teachers and Public expenditure on Elementary Education in India in determining the Enrolment of Girls in Elementary Education and retaining them into the schools, the study uses Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) methodology for the above mentioned period. The null hypothesis of the study is increase in female teachers; numbers of schools and total expenditure on elementary education doesn't have significant impact on the enrolment of girls in elementary education.

Based on the above discussion, all the variables have to be transformed into logarithmic form to obtain a linear model. Thus, we have the following linear model:

$$\ln EREE_t = \theta_0 + \theta_1 \ln FTEE_t + \theta_2 \ln SCEE_t + \theta_3 \ln TEEE_t + \mu_t$$

where,

$\ln EREE_t$  = Natural logarithm of Enrolment of Girls' in Elementary Education

$\ln FTEE_t$  = Natural logarithm of Female Teachers in Elementary Education

$\ln SCEE_t$  = Natural logarithm of Schools in Elementary Education

$\ln TEEE_t$  = Natural logarithm of Total Expenditure(Public) in Elementary Education

$\theta_0, \theta_1, \theta_2$  and  $\theta_3$  are parameters to be estimated and  $\mu_t$  implies the random error term.

## 1.6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study investigates the impact of  $\ln FTEE_t$ ,  $\ln SCEE_t$  and  $\ln TEEE_t$  as an independent variable to a dependent  $\ln EREE_t$  by using OLS methodology. The value of coefficients measure the per cent change in dependent variable of  $\ln EREE_t$  with 1 per cent change in the independent variable. Each input variables contribution in the  $\ln EREE_t$  can be measured, holding other input constant. Table 5 presents the results of the regression analysis as OLS methods was used to estimate the coefficient value of explanatory variables to determine the enrolment of girls in elementary education during the period 1991-92 to 2009-10.

TABLE 5: DETERMINANTS OF ENROLMENT OF GIRLS IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION BY USING OLS METHODOLOGY (Per cent)

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable				
$\ln EREE_t$	Intercept	$\ln FTEE_t$	$\ln SCEE_t$	$\ln TEEE_t$	$R^2$
	-18.42** (0.04)	3.63*** (0.000)	-4.44 (0.67)	-0.88*** (0.001)	0.87

**Notes:** Level of significance \*\*\*, \*\*, \* are denoted as 1 per cent, 5 per cent and 10 per cent respectively. **P values** under brackets denote the probability of the level of significance.

The results depicts that the expected number of enrolment of girls in elementary education ( $\ln EREE_t$ ) is -18.42 (intercept) which represents that number of enrolment of girls in elementary education will be negative when there is no explanatory variables (inputs). The coefficient value of number of female teachers in elementary education ( $\ln FTEE_t$ ) during the last two decade is 3.63, which implies that it has positive impact on ( $\ln EREE_t$ ) and remains statistically highly significant. The results also shows that the number of schools ( $\ln SCEE_t$ ) and total expenditure on elementary education ( $\ln TEEE_t$ ) has a negative impact on number of enrolment of girls in elementary education during the period 1991-92 to 2009-10 and remains statistically insignificant in the case of number of schools and statistically highly significant in the case of total expenditure on elementary education. It implies that a per cent increase in the number of schools ( $\ln SCEE_t$ ) and total expenditure on elementary education ( $\ln TEEE_t$ ) will increase enrolment of girls in elementary education ( $\ln EREE_t$ ) by -4.44 per cent and -0.88 per cent respectively. The overall significance can also be understood from the value of the coefficient of multiple determination i.e.  $R^2$ . The value of  $R^2$  is 0.87 which indicates that about 87 per cent of the variation in the (log of) EREE is explained by the (logs of) all explanatory variables included in the study over the period 1991-92 to 2009-10.

## 1.7 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Education is critical input in human resource development and is essential for country's economic growth and development. There is sufficient evidence in India and the world to show that high literacy rate especially in the case of women, correlates with low birth rates, low infants mortality rates and increase in the rate of life expectancy. However, the forgoing analysis shows that there are huge gender gaps in elementary education in India. This gender gap explains that fewer girls than boys are enrolled in schools and girls find it more difficult to make a transition from primary to upper primary schooling. Further, it is officially admitted that drop-out rate amongst girls is much higher than the boys. Though the drop-out rates have been declining over the years, even a modest gap means that more females than males joined rank of persons with incomplete primary education. The major factors which are responsible for this gender gap are parental motivation for son's education, early marriage, poverty, nature of occupation by parents, child labour, higher cost for education, lack of infrastructure, less number of female teachers, long distance to school and religious factors. Our empirical results found that, increase in number of female teachers has positively impact on the enrolment of girls in elementary schools.

Growth in number of schools has negative impact on the enrolment of girls in school but it remains statistically significant. It means that mere increasing in educational institutions will not bring girls in school and retain them there. What is important is that apart from increasing schools, they should be equipped with basic facility like drinking water and sanitary facilities etc.

Further, total public expenditure has also negatively impact on the enrolment of girls but remains statistically significant. The negative relation of expenditure does not mean that government should not invest on elementary education. There are several other factors also which affect the enrollment of student in schools. There is a need to look at the demand side factors that affect enrolment of children in the school. The NSSO 64<sup>th</sup> round pointed out that the major reason for non-enrolment or dropout was interest related factor and financial constraint. In 2007-08, 34.30 per cent of children left-out school due to interest related factors and 23.80 per cent dropped out due to financial constraint. This confirms that interest related factors rather than economic factors are more important in explaining non-enrolments and dropouts in India. However, the government has to deal with the interest-related factors in more innovative ways; merely an increase in funding may not be enough. Government's spending on education has to be accompanied by other programmes to address non-monetary constraint that people face in their decision to send their children in school.

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## APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1: ENROLMENT OF GIRLS AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Years	Girls' Enrolment at Elementary level
1991-92	46686984
1992-93	45662727
1993-94	44790609
1994-95	49245898
1995-96	50301359
1996-97	50947807
1997-98	54142658
1998-99	35452083
1999-00	35887039
2000-01	56164553
2001-02	69002842
2002-03	87893076
2003-04	91366763
2004-05	83830293
2005-06	74982281
2006-07	87255049
2007-08	80386564
2008-09	90399604
2009-10*	92417562

Note: \* Provisional

Source: Education in India and Selected Educational Statistic, various years, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi

## APPENDIX 2: NUMBER OF FEMALE TEACHERS AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Years	No. of female teacher at Elementary level
1991-92	856607
1992-93	890147
1993-94	919532
1994-95	940417
1995-96	981809
1996-97	996463
1997-98	1079948
1998-99	1072819
1999-00	1118364
2000-01	1181704
2001-02	1262025
2002-03	1391627
2003-04	1485467
2004-05	1438879
2005-06	1531000
2006-07	1598381
2007-08	1743726
2008-09	1812314
2009-10*	1946928

**Note:** \* Provisional

**Source:** Education in India and Selected Educational Statistic, various years, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi

## APPENDIX 3: NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AT ELEMENTARY LEVEL

Years	Number of Elementary Schools
1991-92	722670
1992-93	729746
1993-94	733259
1994-95	755582
1995-96	767555
1996-97	783939
1997-98	805183
1998-99	822087
1999-00	844040
2000-01	845007
2001-02	883667
2002-03	896656
2003-04	974525
2004-05	1042251
2005-06	1061061
2006-07	1090436
2007-08	1113001
2008-09	1124487
2009-10*	1190907

**Note:** \* Provisional

**Source:** Education in India and Selected Educational Statistic, various years, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, New Delhi

## APPENDIX 4: TOTAL PUBLIC EXPENDITURE ON ELEMENTARY EDUCATION (Rs crore)

Year	Total Expenditure on Elementary Education
1991-92	8401.42
1992-93	9477.32
1993-94	10821.80
1994-95	12638.93
1995-96	15217.75
1996-97	17850.44
1997-98	20391.52
1998-99	25114.68
1999-00	27905.10
2000-01	29758.12
2001-02	32493.84
2002-03	33347.33
2003-04	36365.97
2004-05	41874.16
2005-06	50181.99
2006-07	60062.84
2007-08	68709.52
2008-09	79000.84
2009-10*	98499.99

**Note:** \* Provisional

**Source:** analysis of Budgeted Expenditure on Education Sector, Ministry of Human Resource Development, New Delhi, various years

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