

Abstract

Gender Gap in Higher Education: A Study of Student Community in the Higher Educational Institutes of North Bengal

Gender Gap defines the difference or disparity between the sexes. In education gender gap refers predominantly to the less representation of either the female or male from the education system, a situation that requires intervention as well as rectification. Gender and sex are used interchangeably in education research, especially in Higher education where male and female is used to denote man and woman. However, this needs to be identified, as sex assigned at birth and gender identity of people are not the same always. In undertaking explorations regarding the large and complex gamut of issues under the rubric of gender and education in India, the location of the educational institutions, the class, caste, religion of students, teacher student relationship would necessarily have to be taken into account. The higher educational spaces play a predominant role in identity formation of individuals, where they find a voice of equality, having spent substantial amount of time in these spaces. Being of a certain gender holds broader meaning, with cultural concepts of masculinity and femininity coming into play. Gender is deeply cultural, like race, it is a social construction with real consequences, particularly for those who do not conform to gender binaries. It refers to the continuum of complex psychosocial self-perceptions, attitudes, and expectations people have about members of both sexes. Gender is understood as a concept that implies masculine, feminine and other gender identities which is achieved by every individual. Gender is taught and learned by the individual as a member of the society with different cultural settings. The enrolment of female students in the HEI of North Bengal is more than that of the male students, but they fall behind in representation of the work force. So, the study quantifies the perceptions of the students attending the different HEIs of North Bengal, regarding gender, the factors that determine the choice of HEI and the awareness of the students about the different government initiatives and schemes.

The objectives fulfilled in the study are to analyse the location of various types of higher educational institutions present in the study area, to examine the factors that play important role in choice of higher educational institutes by students, analysis of the trend in enrolment status of students in higher educational institutions in different streams of education and their choice of subject depending on the gender of students, existence of gender stereotypes and gender roles in the higher educational spaces and awareness of the students about the government welfare schemes in higher education.

The study is based on both secondary and primary sources of data. The colleges have been selected using Multi Stage Sampling Method and the 586 students have been surveyed from the 36 colleges at random. 10 students from the LGBTQ community have been surveyed with the help of a separate questionnaire to understand the problems they face in the HEIs. All the universities and female colleges were visited for the study and documentation. The methodologies used in the study are: Chi – square test, Phi –

coefficient, Spearman's Rank Correlation, Point Biserial Correlation, t- test, Chronbach's Alpha and percentage analysis. HEIs from all the six districts (as per Census 2011) has been covered in the study. There are five hypotheses proved in the study. Major findings of the study area are that:

In the study area there are 150 rural colleges in the region and only 52 urban colleges. The maximum number of rural colleges are located in the district of Malda, 41 colleges, followed by Uttar Dinajpur which has 24 rural colleges and Dakshin Dinajpur, with 23 rural HEIs. Despite the rural – urban distribution of colleges, excellence in HE remains in pockets, the old HEI are still preferred by the students who score well in their examination like ABN Seal College, Siliguri College, AC College and the likes.

The location and the number of HEIs are disadvantageous in the study areas unlike the southern districts of West Bengal. North Bengal has low density of HEI. There are only 10 HEI/1000 sq. km. in North Bengal compared to 18 HEI/1000 sq.km in southern Bengal. In North Bengal only Darjiling district has 16 HEI/1000 sq.km. which is equal to and more than the state and national average value respectively. The reason behind this could be the influence of the British in this district. Dakshin Dinajpur and Malda has 12 HEI/ 1000 sq.km. and most of the HEIs are B.Ed. colleges, which has been repeatedly discussed throughout the chapter. In North Bengal the overall LQ is less than unity which means that there is low concentration of universities in the region and the total number of universities in the region are highly dispersed. In the six districts of North Bengal, Darjiling and Malda district has low concentration (L.Q. value less than unity) and the highest concentration is in Koch Bihar. The degree colleges also have very low concentration in North Bengal and are highly dispersed. The highest concentration of degree colleges in North Bengal is in the district of Koch Bihar which is 1.23, followed by Darjiling district, 1.15 . Malda, Dakshin Dinajpur and Uttar Dinajpur which have a smaller number of General Degree colleges (shown and discussed in Table 3.12) have high concentration of teachers' training HEIs. The L.Q. value of the both the districts are more than unity which are 2.94, 2.38 and 3.05 respectively. As the overall concentration in the northern region is high Jalpaiguri, Koch Bihar also has high concentration of such HEIs except Darjiling district which has the TT HEIs dispersed and have low concentration.

In the study area all the existing universities are State Public University. There is no Central University, Institute of National Importance and Private University in the study area. North Bengal has 5 existing universities, there are new universities functional in the districts Dakshin Dinajpur, Alipurduar, Darjiling and Jalpaiguri districts, but these universities do not have exclusive campuses and share infrastructure with local degree colleges. Despite the number of HEIs in the study none of the institutes are placed in the NIRF ranking. North Bengal University falls in the rank band 150 – 200.

Very few colleges in rural North Bengal have science subjects taught in the HEIs, with the exception being Darjiling (the educationally developed district of North Bengal). In

Koch Bihar district only Mathabhanga College and Sitalkhuchi College offer science courses. None of the colleges in rural Koch Bihar offer commerce courses of study. In rural Jalpaiguri, Maynaguri College is the sole institute that offers science. Darjeeling Government College, in rural Darjiling, which was established in 1948 offers a course of study in all the three streams of study. Darjiling district is an exception as both the rural and urban colleges are old and offer science and commerce subjects along with arts and social science. The urban colleges are however different from the rural colleges where almost all the colleges provide all three stream courses of study. Some colleges even have infrastructure to offer master's degree courses like A.B.N. Seal College, Koch Bihar College, Balurghat College, Malda College, Alipurduar College (now University), Siliguri College. The courses offered also depend on the surrounding areas it caters to, like Dr. Meghnad Saha College which draws students from Malda, Dakshin Dinajpur and Uttar Dinajpur offers science subjects for the students. Same is seen in Islampur College which is located near to Darjiling district so has students who enroll themselves from the surrounding rural areas of Darjiling district and Kishanganj district of Bihar.

The female students are more in number in the HEI of the study area but when looked at the work participation in the HEI, the number of male teachers is more compared to the female. Enrolment of female students is more in the subjects that fall under the category of arts and social science.

Out of the total 202 HEIs in North Bengal 45.05 percent of the colleges have a playground which is absent in 7.92 percent colleges. majority of the colleges do not have health care centers which should be one the necessary infrastructural facility available in the HEIs, 86.15 percent colleges do not have a health center. The students and the institutions are supported by the first aid boxes in case of any medical emergency. Most of these physical set – up is missing in the colleges of North Bengal. 57.43 percent of the colleges do not have common room for students, in Shree Agrasen College (North Dinajpur) the library reading room is used as a common room by the students. 67.82 percent colleges do not have a computer center, and in some colleges where it is present the computers are not functional for the use of students. 51.98 percent colleges do not have separate common room for girls and separate toilet for girls.

The students who study in the all women colleges, the choice of institute was either made by the parents for safety reasons. The educational spaces for the students are secure places away from home with people who can be called their peer. The students who were surveyed spend quality time in the HEIs, 22.12 percent females spend 5 – 7 hours in the HEI space and 25.63 percent males spend similar amount of time in the institute.

None of the students during the survey had opted for the Student's Credit Card Scheme. The female students do not want to avail money from the scheme because they do not know if they can repay the loan. This is linked with the social constraint of WHO WOULD HELP THEM REPAY? They might get married and the liability may dwindle as to who will pay the loan later.

The study depicts the gender representation of students in higher education institutions (HEIs) in North Bengal, the various factors that influence college selection, the gender perspectives of students, and the existing gender norms. The examination of the various programmes offered by the central and state governments has also been conducted. The study demonstrates that despite the significant number of female students enrolled in the HEI in the study area, it is substantially segregated based on course selection. There is a continuous process of addressing gender in the HES of the study field, both quantitatively and qualitatively.