

**RESEARCH PAPER****Gender Equity Reform in Higher Education of Nepal: Challenges and Policies implication**

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**Abstract**

This study examines gender equity reform in higher education in Nepal by analyzing secondary data from policy documents, research articles, government reports, and international organization publications. The purpose of the study is to explore the major challenges faced in achieving gender equity and to evaluate existing policy implications in the higher education sector. The study adopts a qualitative secondary data analysis method to review gender-related policies, institutional frameworks, and educational reforms in Nepal. The findings reveal that despite significant progress in female enrollment and policy development, gender disparities still exist due to socio-cultural barriers, limited access to resources, lack of institutional support, and weak policy implementation. The study also highlights the gap between policy formulation and practical implementation in universities and colleges. The research recommends strengthening gender-sensitive policies, improving monitoring mechanisms, promoting inclusive educational environments, and increasing government and institutional commitment to gender equity reforms in higher education in Nepal.

**Keywords:** Gender Equity, Higher Education, Nepal, Policy Reform, Secondary Data, Educational Challenges

## Introduction

Over a past few decades, there has been a constant discussion regarding the issues of equity in education throughout the world. Equity in education can be referred in terms of major two dimensions. First is *inclusion*, which ensures basic criteria of “education for all” including opportunity and access and the second one is *fairness* which states that personal and social circumstances including gender, socio-economic background, ethnic groups etc. should not act as barriers for education achievement (Field, Kuczera, & Pont, 2007). Out of different forms of equity, gender equity is also one of the most critical and sensitive issue. Gender equity is defined as fairness of treatment to both male and female based on their respective needs, which includes equivalency in terms of right, duties, opportunities, obligations and so on (UNESDOC, 2000). It further adds that gender equity slightly differs from gender equality as equality treats everyone equally irrespective of their gender i.e. responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on whether they are male or female whereas equity considers the “need” factors and provides fairness and opportunity based on the need. Classic theories of equity in education highlights the importance of “educational justice” and states the need to adjust relationship of interest of social group and reasonably deploy and allocate resources by understanding their needs and giving more than needed. Overall, the theory states that gender equity is the summation of gender equality plus the social justice and is the process of allocating resources to both genders fairly (ERASMUS +, 2017).

### Gender equity in Education

Education plays crucial role in developing both individual and society, and being able to create equitable environment through fairness and inclusion in education is very important aspect of progressive society. OECD states that equity in education matters as it provides basic human rights to people to develop their capabilities and

participate in society; it reduces long term social and financial cost which occurs due to educational failure and lack of skills. Similarly, it leads to social cohesion and trust by reducing the issues faced by people from low socio-economic background, minorities, migrants, and underprivileged groups (Field, Kuczera, & Pont, 2007). In different parts of the society, there is significant number of reforms, policies and initiatives being carried out to ensure gender equity in education in all levels including basic, secondary and higher education. Research shows that some aspect of the equity has been achieved with these reform policies including increase in girls participation rates, increase in participation from lower economic background and minority groups, increase in number of female faculties and leaders etc.

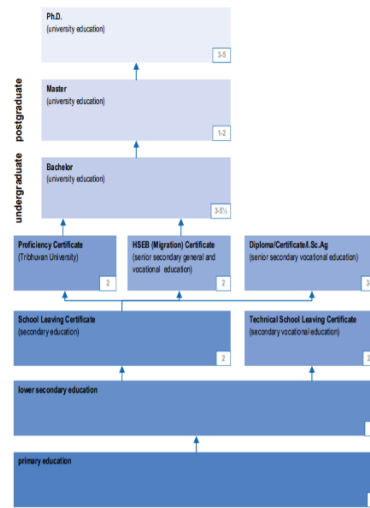
However, there is still crucial need to ponder into the deeper issues of gender equity and it requires collective efforts from individual, structural and societal level to tackle the challenges of inequalities in education system. Especially in developing world, gender inequalities still exists in various forms including socio-cultural issues, lack of access to education, lack of opportunities, discrimination etc.

### In context to Nepal

While talking about the gender inequalities in education, one such country, which is still facing the issues of inequalities, is “Nepal”. The variables that determines equity in terms of Nepal are gender, geographical regions, ethnicity, caste, socio-economic background, languages, minority groups etc. Nepal is a small landlocked country in Southeast Asia, situated between two giant Nations- China and India. It has population of about 28 million along with diverse geography, glorious history and rich culture. It is now in its developing phase with growth in both public and private sectors investment in terms of education, health, infrastructure, and transportations as compared to the past. Nevertheless, Nepal faces tremendous challenges in terms of education; and gender inequality in education is one major

barrier that is causing the country to lag behind in terms of socio- economic growth and productivity. Nepal’s long historical and social factors has led to immense gender inequalities in the educational pipeline. Despite the increasing efforts and reform initiatives to overcome these inequalities, there still exists certain barriers and hurdles regarding equity particularly in context to tertiary education of Nepal. The equity issues are measured through access, inclusion, fairness and opportunities. Studies show that there exists wide gap in enrollment rates among boys and girls, especially for girls of certain socio-economic background, region and ethnicity; access to higher education still seems to be unachievable. Similarly, even the participation rates of female teachers, faculty and leaders remains to be low in tertiary education. Even though the female participation rates are increasing as compared to the past, data shows that Nepal has one of the highest gender gap in higher education for both students and faculties. The enrollments rates are 71.6% male and 44.5% female (NWCR, 2018).The reasons for this comes with the baggage of various social, economic, structural, psychological and individual barriers and requires in-depth research and stronger reform policies from government and institutional level to overcome the challenges and create equality in both education system and society. (Bennett, 2005). States that the reasons behind contemporary gender inequalities in educational opportunities and outcomes are highly attributed to ongoing biasness and inequalities in education policy framework. Hence, considering these issues of gender equity in education, the focus of this paper lies in identifying various barriers in attaining gender equity and reform policies being implemented to overcome these inequalities. It further attempts to analyze and discuss about the reforms policies and recommend ways to make it more effective to overcome the challenges of gender equity in higher education of Nepal.

**Table1: Background of Higher Education in Nepal**



*Source: Education system Nepal | Nuffic | 1st edition, December 2014 | version 1, January 2015*

Nepal is small and beautiful landlocked country, which is rich in its natural resources, culture, history and hospitable people, but at the same time due to the mountainous terrain; it suffers from tremendous challenges for socioeconomic development and faces difficulties in expanding the infrastructure. As per the UN Human Development Index 2015, Nepal ranked 144<sup>th</sup> out of 188 countries and remained one of the least developed countries in Asia. According to the Asian Development Bank, approximately 25% of the population lived in less than USD \$1 per day in 2010/2011. (Dragana Borenovic Dilas, 2018). Nepal’s system of governance is currently in transition. Since the adoption of the 2015 constitution, Nepal is delineated into seven different states, with political powers, including the administration of education, expected to shift increasingly to states and local governments The Federal Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for developing overall education policies and directives for the country including curriculum and textbook development, the training and recruitment of teachers, and conceptualizing and administering Nepal’s national examinations through [National Education Board](#). Improvements in the policies and plans of education system shows that

progress has been made and most Nepali youths today have much better educational opportunities as compared to the past.

### Literature Review

The education system of contemporary Nepal evolved in 1951 after the country transitioned to a more representative political system from absolute monarchy where only exclusive privileged wealthy elites were allowed to study. During that time the literacy rate was 5% with no universities, only few hundred schools and less than 1% population as students i.e. approximately 10,000 students which was dominated entirely by men. (Dragana Borenovic Dilas, 2018).

### Current scenario of Education

After the educational reform such as National education system plan in 1950's; education has expanded significantly and have created more modern and egalitarian system with compulsory public basic education. As per 2016, throughout Nepal there are 10 universities, 1400 colleges, and 35,222 elementary and secondary schools. However, Nepal's universities are usually not regarded to be of [very high quality](#) and the standard world university rankings do not include a single Nepali university. The basic priorities of government is to expand educational opportunities and seek to shift Nepal from the status of least developed country by 2022 through strengthening education system and providing equal access and quality education to all (2016 school sector development plan). Government spending on education in Nepal has declined in recent years. Government expenditures on education as a percentage of GDP dropped from a high of 4.6% in 2009 to 3.7% in 2015. (World Bank). Education expenditures as a percentage of total government spending, likewise, decreased from 25.5% in 2008 to 17.1 % in 2015 (World Bank). Government spending per tertiary student plunged by almost 82 % between 2000 and 2015. When taking into account private expenditures, overall expenditures on education in Nepal have slightly increased over the past years. Aggregating public and private

expenditures, [UNESCO found](#) that total education spending as a percentage of GDP increased from 8.9 % in 2008/09 to 9.3 % in 2014/15. What these numbers demonstrate is that education expenditures in Nepal are increasingly dominated by private sources. More than half of all education funding in 2014/15 ([56.3 %](#)) was from private households and other aid organizations.

### Context of Higher Education

The beginning of modern higher education in Nepal started in 1918 with the establishment of Public institute named Tri-Chandra College. However, number of public and private colleges started only after the democracy in 1951. Nepal's first university "Tribhuvan University" was established in 1971. Now, there are number of public Higher education institutions established by act of parliament under the University grant commission (UGC), which functions to disburse government fund to public institutions. Grant recipients need to meet set quality criteria in order to receive government funding and are audited for compliance. If these institutions meet the criteria, they are managed, funded channeled and monitored under UGC. There are various affiliated campuses, which are operated, managed, administered and funded under the Universities. They have full management autonomy, including in matters like the recruitment of teaching staff and the setting of tuition fees. Different universities, UGC, partially decentralized institutions and programs, professional societies, quality assurance and accreditation councils (QAAC) look after the quality and issues of higher education in Nepal. Through National commissions, Nepal has been preparing strategic vision for education sectors to improve its quality. Some of the ongoing and planned policy reforms include decentralization within universities; adoption of autonomous institutes, formula based funding for universities, introduction of means tested students financial assistance programs to benefit meritorious and needy students, affirmation actions and quotas to uplift underprivileged groups etc. Higher

education in Nepal is comprised of academic Programs starting from bachelor's degree and above. The ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for handling higher education in Nepal. The duration of bachelor's level is 3-5 years, masters is 2 years, MPhil is 2-3 years and PhD is 4-8 years. There are 10 universities and approximately 600 higher education institutions in total. The total expenditure on education is \$ 1.26 billion and contributes to 9.91% of GDP as of 2017/18 out of which 0.4% is of Higher education (World Bank Report , 2018). As per the report of World Education Service (WES), there has been a significant development in some aspects of education in Nepal. However, it still requires massive improvements in many areas to foster better education system, which can be shown with the data below: (reviews, W. e. (2018, April). Education in Nepal). The number of tertiary students has increased by 40.7 percent between 2000 and 2013, from 94,041 students to 477,077 students in 2013 (UIS). However, since that time, the number of students has leveled off and fallen to 361,077 students in 2016. The overwhelming majority of these students ([88.3 percent](#)) were enrolled in bachelor's programs in 2016. The number of graduate enrollments is small and accounted for only 11.3% at the master's level and less than 0.5 percent in advanced graduate and doctoral programs. This is reflected in the types of academic programs being offered in Nepal. In 2010/11, fully 80 percent of HEIs offered only bachelor's programs, while 19 percent also offered master's programs and only the main university campuses (less than one percent of all campuses) had Ph.D. programs. The gender parity index for enrollments in higher education jumped from 0.17 to 1.08 from 1973 to 2016. This means that female entry rates in education improved from being marginal at best to females now enrolling at slightly higher rates than males. (World Bank). In 2007, the University Grant Commission established a Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (QAAC) tasked with the accreditation of academic institutions and programs to improve the quality

in Nepal's rapidly growing higher education environment. Accreditation by the QAAC is granted for five-year periods. To qualify for assessment by the QAAC, HEIs must be affiliated with a university, must have offered programs for five years (or "produced at least 2 batches of graduates"), and 50 percent of its teaching staff, including the director and department heads, must be full-time professors. Accreditation by the QAAC is strictly voluntary but remains insignificant in Nepal as of now. Only 19 HEI achieved recognition in 2018. (reviews, 2018). Almost 79% students were enrolled at programs offered through Tribhuvan University, followed by Pokhara University 7.2%, Purbanchal University 6.5% and Kathmandu University 4.6%. The most popular majors were management (42.2%), education (24.8%), and humanities and social studies (10.7%). There is comparatively lower enrollment rates in professional disciplines like medicine or engineering because of less opportunity for high school graduates in technical fields, and the fact that these programs are costly to operate and therefore only offered by a small minority of institutions, which usually charge high tuition fees. (reviews, W. e. (2018, April). Education in Nepal). Pass rates in Nepal differs strongly by institution and program, but are low on average. At Tribhuvan University, where the vast majority of Nepal's students are enrolled, the pass rate in bachelor's programs stood at only 26.6% in 2015/16. Marginalized groups and rural populations also continue to have less access to tertiary education than urban populations and members of upper castes. While gender parity has been achieved, the enrollment ratio in higher education among disadvantaged groups like Dalits was in 2010/11, which is still lower.

#### Issues in Higher Education

Considering the data's and current scenario, we can say that there exists numerous challenges and hurdles in the education system of Nepal. According to World Bank (Report, 2001) some of the issues in higher education of Nepal includes:

Access to education is limited for girls, women, certain social groups and ethnic minorities. Quality: The quality of teachers, curriculum, and infrastructure is low and there is lack of training and mentorship to uplift the quality of teachers. Equity and inclusion: Social, cultural, economic and structural barriers has led to discrimination for certain group of people. Even though access to all levels of the education system has increased, participation remains unequal across income, gender and social groups and the benefits of public subsidies are inequitably distributed. The bottom welfare quintile's share in Higher education is only about 2%. Policies: there is poor formulation and implementation of administrative policies and program, ineffective administration and governance. Politicization: Lack of suitable and supportive political and social environment and teaching force is highly politicized. Leadership: lack of professionalism, vision and commitment among the leaders at most levels. Management of education system is centralized. There exists wide gap between private and public institutes. There exists social disparities due to language barriers. Levels of literacy and educational attainment is low. There is high repetition and dropout rates. The system does not serve the labor market well. There are challenges of Examination system. There is lack of research and development opportunities to both students.

#### **Method and Material**

All the literatures related to the topic were searched systematically through the online databases including google scholar, Web of Science, ERIC, JSTOR, ProQuest, Sage journals, Beijing Normal University library etc. The Academic research papers and Journals were selected based on its quality, relevancy and empirical contribution to the topic for the period of ten years in context to Nepal.

#### **Result and Discussion**

##### **Gender Equity Issues and Challenges**

As per the National data, the total enrollment in higher education based on gender is 71.6% male and 44.5% female (NWCR, 2018). This clearly

shows the persistent of gender inequality in education system of Nepal. Even though the participation rates of female students and faculties in private institutions are higher as compared to public, the differences are not significant and remains somewhat similar. Studies and research have identified different reasons behind the inequalities. According to UNESCO, many challenges exists for young women and adolescent girls in terms of access, participation and completion of good quality education. Women have limited access to education, health services, property, social security and freedom, as well as decision-making processes (NWCR, 2018). Various factors leading to inequalities has been identified out of which major barriers includes socio-cultural factors, economic factors and institutional factors for women in all levels including students, teachers and leaders. (Witenstein & Palmer, 2013).

##### **Socio-cultural Factors**

Findings shows that in Nepalese society, the magnitude of problems including access, illiteracy, enrollment, dropouts, discrimination for girls and women is due to socio-cultural factors attached with it. The stereotypical thinking regarding gender roles and identity is causing the major obstacles for female students as well as teachers and faculty in educational institutions. The patriarchy societal norms in Nepal's legal and socioeconomic environment is one of the reason behind widespread inequality in terms of legal outcomes, employment and education (Nowack, 2015) (Bhadra & Shah, 2007) (ADB, 2010) (UNESCO, 2015). Girls and women face numerous challenges in their daily life including the need to fulfil multiple roles, need to manage workload and time. In most of the houses, girls are expected to do household chores and have societal restrictions, which creates high risk of dropping out of schools and colleges (Khandker, Levison, & Moe, 1998). The current social system still divides role according to gender and assigns domestic tasks to women and men take control over women's sexuality, due to which they have limited social interaction

and are strictly supervised and restricted to go out without permission (Stromquist, 1992). These impediments further varies depending on the social group, geographic region and ethnicity. Female living in rural areas, belonging to certain ethnic minorities (especially Dalit groups: historically considered as untouchable castes) are mostly disadvantaged in educational attainment. Similarly, due to psychological biasness including the belief that girls should focus more on taking care of family and husband rather than continue higher studies is causing inequality in participation (Witenstein & Palmer, 2013). Though it is illegal, the trend of early marriages is still popular in most of the ethnic groups. The social norms dictates girls to get married after certain age and after reaching the age of 16-18, they are forced to get married, and involve in household activities. This is the major reason for low enrollment to higher education (Acharya & Metsämuuronen, 2013). Lack of knowledge and awareness about the importance of education among both parents and children are also the reason behind the inequalities. In some part, lack of provision of proper hygiene facilities especially during menstruation is one of the major reason why girls tend to avoid going to colleges. Early pregnancy is also another major factor hindering the girl's education in some part of Nepalese society. Likewise, the discriminating behavior in both colleges (Hickey & Stratton, 2007) and home (Bandyopadhyay & Subrahmanian, 2008) have been observed due to which girls are more likely to dropout (Sabates, 2010). However, we cannot assume that the problem of gender inequalities doesn't exist in urban areas. Though comparatively lower, the traditional belief system is still prevalent throughout the country (Mandal, Koirala, Baidya, Maharjan, & Rai, 2008). Likewise, the issues of safety and gender-based violence are also some common reasons leading to lower participation of female in higher education. These barriers hold true even for female teachers and faculty members in both public and private higher education institutions. (UNESCO).

### **Economic factors**

Some of the economic reasons leading to gender inequalities in terms of access and participation is poverty. ADB report 2018 shows the differential treatment in education expenditure in which parents spend more on son's education than they do on daughter's education. This is one of the major barriers for girl's enrollment in higher education. Parents tend to believe that son are the bread earners and will take care of them in future and belief that daughters belong to their husband's family due to which they prefer sending their son to school when they have inadequate money and resources (Mandal, Koirala, Baidya, Maharjan, & Rai, 2008). Likewise, they consider girls education as opportunity cost. As due to cultural reasons, it is required to spend more money on girls marriages, they belief that rather than spending on education, it is wise to save for their marriages. (Bandyopadhyay & Subrahmanian, 2008). Further ads that the people believe that incentive for parents to pay for girls' education are lower as compared to boys not only because they face discrimination in labor market but also because boys are expected to look after their parents. These barriers tend to be more in rural areas and public institutions as compared to private institutions in urban areas. (Witenstein & Palmer, 2013).

### **Institutional & Structural Factors**

Female students do not participate or tend to drop out of higher education due to various structural factors associated with it. In many instances, education systems and plans are not gender-responsive and do not take into consideration girls' and women's particular needs (unesco) (Witenstein & Palmer, 2013). States that gender insensitive pedagogy is one of the major barrier for gender equity. They further add that teachers tend to pay more attention to male and even the textbooks are male-centric which makes female students feel discriminated. Similarly, the curriculum favors traditional gender roles and encouragement to follow the traditional course selection is also hindering girl's participation in higher education (Collins, 2009).

The biasness is not only limited to students but also even the female teachers and faculties are considered to be less competent and believe they have lower credentials as compared to their male counterparts and there is less opportunity for their promotions and professional development activities.

### **Reform Policies for Gender Equity in higher education of Nepal**

Considering the various forms of socio-cultural, economic and structural barriers towards girls and women in higher education, Government of Nepal with support of different non-governmental organizations, educational institutions and agencies have formulated reform policies to create gender equitable environment. Some of the policies and actions includes:

- Ministry of Education and Sports 2003 have implemented “Education for All” initiative and the “school sector reform plan” for equal participation for girls in all level of education. This has led to increase in the net enrollment ratios as compared to the past. However the participation of girls in private education and higher education is still low (DOE, 2015).
- Provision of quotas system and affirmative actions in educational institutions women, indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, disables, dalit groups and people from lower socio economic background to increase their participation and make equity part of the education agenda.
- As per article 22, 33, 142 in Nepal’s constitution, there is strategic policies for gender equity and social inclusions including gender-mainstreaming programs, capacity development initiatives, ensuring representation and participation of women in education, implementing gender responsive budgeting, and collaboration with different stakeholders to promote and foster gender equity.
- Government of Nepal has implemented policies to ensure equity in schools and campuses. As per the recent and updated policy, people who practice chaupadi pratha (need to stay in cow shed during menstruation) will be criminalized

and all public schools should be provided with free sanitary pads as menstruation and hygiene issues are also one of the major barriers for girls and women.

- With support from Government, since 2015, UNESCO has implemented “[The Female Champions](#)”, a three-month long fellowship program with the aim of boosting confidence, enhancing leadership skills and providing an intensive learning platform for young women across the country.
- The [UNESCO Priority Gender Equality Action Plan 2014-2021](#)(GEAP) attempts to promote gender equality through gender mainstreaming and gender specific programming. The [UNESCO policy on engaging with indigenous peoples](#) supports the efforts to implement the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#) across all relevant program areas.
- UNESCO Nepal targets at the most marginalized groups in society, such as populations living in the most remote areas, people with disabilities, ethnic and linguistic minorities and *Dalits*, of whom girls and women are especially vulnerable.
- Since 2009, Nepal has also joined Global Partnership for Education and has received GPE implementation grant allocations of US\$177 million. With the financial and technical support from GPE, it is working on a new education sector plan. The strategies include scholarship targeting all girls, construction of girl’s friendly toilets, and campaigns like welcome to school. This has helped Nepal to achieve gender parity in enrollment with increase in the enrollments rates at all level especially for girls, it has increased from 45% to 62% in past 13 years (Banham & Ahern, 2016).

### **A case of Quota system for Gender Equity**

Government of Nepal with support of other agencies and organizations has been initiating various reform policies to encourage and uplift women, indigenous groups, ethnic minorities, disables and people from backward areas. Out of different such initiatives, quota system (also referred as *reservation system* and *affirmative actions*) is one of the special kind of reform

policies to increase female participation. It reserves certain percentage of seats for Female especially for those belonging to certain social group or ethnic minority in order to increase their participation. These actions are significant in reducing traditional injustice towards girls and women by creating fairness and equitable environment (Glen, 2013). Quotas and affirmative actions has proved to be one of the policy mechanism to promote equity of access, inclusion and opportunity in higher education (Moses et al., 2019).

In context to higher education of Nepal, these policies are being beneficial for female at both student and faculty level in encouraging them to participate in tertiary education, increasing enrollment rates, meeting their needs, providing them opportunities, and increasing confidence and morale by making them more independent. With the appointment of gender focal points at the district education office level, Nepal has used quota to increase the number of female students and faculties and expanded non-formal education that has allowed students to be part of formal education (Banham & Ahern, 2016). The provision of quota system for female faculties is compulsory in public institutions but even in private institutions, it is gaining popularity and colleges are implementing quotas as their internal policy mechanism.

Global Partnership for Education (GPE) policy brief further highlights that quotas, with thoughtful integrated and consolidated equity approach, have helped Nepali education address multiple exclusion factors including gender, disability, ethnicity, poverty, geographical location and vulnerable groups. For this, Ministry of education identifies its most disadvantaged learners and addresses the issues including access, participation and learning through specific activities like monitoring learning outcomes, identifying the causes of gender disparities, providing scholarships and various forms of financial, emotional and psychological support to excluded group (Banham & Ahern, 2016).

These integrated strategies of quotas and other equity efforts have allowed Nepal to achieve high equitable access rates in short span of time. The UNESCO world inequality database on education also shows that there is significant improvement and the gap between gender, geographic location and ethnicity has decreased as compared to the past. From 56% it has reduced to 22% within 10 years. Even the most disadvantaged group i.e. female from Dalit groups (ethnic minority) have also made significant progress. With the help of these disaggregated data and equity index tools to identify, target and support needy groups, Nepal will soon achieve its target to address and assist the most disadvantage groups including poorest population i.e. from 10 most disadvantage district for interventions. For this GPE program, implementation grant of US\$59 million was also provided to Nepal under the results-based funding model (Banham & Ahern, 2016).

With the development of reform policies and quotas system to create gender equity in education, there has been a lot of positive changes in the Country. Nepal now prides to be non-discriminatory towards girls and women. Though not equally, but their presence have increased as compared to the past. Nepal now has a woman President, women chief justice and many other strong female educators, leaders, entrepreneurs, representing the Nation in different backgrounds. Even the girls and women from minor groups are enrolling and participating in higher education, openly raising their voices, speaking up for themselves and making their own decisions.

#### **Issues of Quota System**

Even though, Nepalese educational institutions have achieved significant gender equity through integrated policy strategies, the concerns regarding the quotas system remains to be debatable issue to a certain level. Even in the international context, affirmative actions and quotas have been a topic of huge discussions. Although there is no evidence to show that girls and women who are via quotas and affirmative

actions are less capable or perform less than men and women they have replaced, there are increasing concerns regarding its fairness and effectiveness. There is widely held view that these measures are anti-meritocratic. Some even claim that these policies are causing psychological implications, as they do not address the actual need of women but rather make them feel less confident and disliked at the institutions (Jennifer Whelan, Robert Wood, 2012). Some studies have argued that quotas and affirmative action alone do not solve the issue of gender disparity but rather lead to further discrimination. In fact, in an already unequal societal structure, those having access and power in decision-making may manipulate the policy of quota system. Hence, instead of just setting quotas to increase female participation, universities and colleges need to follow more holistic approach including strategies, culture, mindset, process and system to encourage girls and women to pursue higher studies and ensure equity. (Dr Brooke Magnanti, 2019) (Jennifer Whelan, Robert Wood, 2012).

Another issue regarding quotas and policies is that sometimes it might only be created in papers but might not be applicable in reality and hence, it is essential to ensure that policies are actually being implemented along with the focus on its effectiveness, impact and outcomes of these solutions.

After analyzing gender equity reform, its challenges and policy implications in context to Nepal, we should note that it is necessary to ensure effective implementation and utilization of quotas and other reform policies. For that, it is important for education institutions with support from Government and other agencies to consider few important reform measures. For instance, finding out if institutional changes are being implemented effectively or not and if not, what can be done to make it more effective, what are the outcomes of the structural changes regarding gender equity and understanding how it is measured and finding if female participation has increased after the changes in system and

policies or there is no significant changes. Similarly, finding out apart from increasing participation rates, what other factors that can measure or determine gender equity for female student and teachers. Similarly, it should also be noted that even though there is increasing girls and women's representation in higher education with the help of quotas and policy measures; this "*increasing number*" should not be the only indicator to measure equity. In fact, policies and structure should be created in a way that it provides fairness, equal opportunities, identifies capabilities of both genders, values them and provides justice based on their needs. Quotas are meant to bridge the inequality gap created by generations of social, economic and institutional policies that were not in favor of women. However, we should be careful in balancing the quotas and policies to create equality with raising awareness and most importantly raising quality through girls and women participation. We must also be careful of not letting these quota system damage the incentive structure that support the generic growth of women in a free and competitive setting.

#### **Discussion & Conclusion**

"Gender equity"-a kind of reform in education, remains a crucial issue throughout the world. Studies show that on one hand, there has been ongoing challenges regarding it and on other hand, there has been introduction of various policy implications to address the challenge and ensure equity. Considering the importance of gender equity in education, this research paper, through review of different literatures, aimed to identify some of the challenges in attaining gender equity in higher education institutions in Nepalese context including various societal, economical and institutional barriers. The paper also helped to identify various reform policies being implemented to overcome those challenges. It also provided a case of one of the most popular form of reform policy i.e. quota system and discussed its importance and issues. After analyzing different literatures regarding gender equity, we can say that plenty of aspects

and issues are yet to be considered in Nepalese education system. The lack of sufficient information and data on the policy implications shows the dearth of importance attached to this issue. Studies shows that the issue of gender equity has multifaceted dimensions, and reviewing the literatures alone will only capture the small portion of the problem. As there are inadequate research done regarding gender equity in Nepal, the issues should be measured adequately (for instance, there is need to focus on whether the institutional changes are being implemented? is it effective? how is it being measured? What are the outcomes? Has the participation of female students and teachers increased after the policy changes? What are the situation in public vs. private institutions?) For this, Nepalese education institutions can learn lessons from the systems that have successfully adapted changes and obtained positive results in overcoming the hurdles faced by female students and faculties. Likewise, certain benchmark and criteria should be set to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of reform policies like quotas for further improvement. Another major issue in the study of gender equity in Nepal is that there exists high level of societal barriers. As also mentioned by literatures, the most important but difficult way to address the challenge is by changing the stereotype mindset. It requires change in the perception on “gender equity” “gender equality” and “gender roles” from societal, individual, cultural and organizational perspectives to address the bigger challenge and remove the unseen, attitudinal and psychological barriers leading to inequality. Nevertheless, changing these stereotype thoughts cannot be achieved overnight. At the same time, there is need to realize that improvements in some specific fields does not assure equity in lives of girls and women throughout the country. The reality of women of certain social group and region is still harsh and these policies might not always provide positive changes but rather requires and demands collaborative efforts from individual, structural and societal level in order to

ponder into deeper issues. Therefore, government and educational institutes have to be careful in devising policy measures based on the findings from other countries. Additionally, these policies and programs should also include contextual elements as well in their own unique environment (Hasim, Nman, & Kaur, 2016). As Nepal has varied culture, ethnicity and socio-economic level, issue of gender equity must be looked upon from the careful eyes of culture specific situations. For instance, in rural part of the country there exists more societal barriers and changes in institutional policies alone might not be able to address all these issues and hence requires changes based on the cultural and societal norms. Likewise, it has to be viewed in a different context of different organizational structure of an academic institution than a corporate structure or a political structure. Although we can draw inference from cross-institutional settings, education institution specific studies can only truly capture the problem relating to the field and help us in devising appropriate policy interventions. Another major concern in the study of gender equity is the over emphasis on exogenous factors. In reality, this phenomenon may be significantly affected by endogenous factors, which could be an area for further research. As highlighted by the studies, external factors like societal, economical and institutional barriers played a significant role in explaining the lower level of female participation. However, with the changing landscape and development in the understanding of gender equity and increased role of women in the society, the debate on these endogenous factors seem to have lost its significance. However, with the development of these newer contexts, there is a need for future studies to focus on new challenges and factors internal to gender equity. This means along with changes in policies, it requires female students and teachers own initiation and active enthusiasm to participate in higher education and it is also necessary to understand their

perspectives and needs while formulating the policies.

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