

# **Analyzing the Educational Attainment of People in Nepal from Gender Perspective**

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## ***Abstract***

*Education is a key tool for human civilization but many people are deprived of it and do not have equal chance to achieve it from gender point of view in society, though everyone has an equal right to get it. In this context, this study tries to explore the literacy status, educational attainment. The major concern of preparing this article was to study this issue extracting the data from two immediate past censuses of Nepal and analysing them by using the Microsoft Excel programme. Humanities and Arts, Business and Administration, Education, Science, and Social and Behavioural Science are supposed to be more selected subjects of study for both males and females at the national level. More gender gap in terms of literacy and level of education seems to occur though the level of education increases in all provinces.*

**Keywords:** Literacy status, educational attainment, major fields, gender, census

## **Introduction**

Education is considered as one of the key factors associated with human civilization; and the educational status of the population signifies people's well-being and quality of life. It is the gateway for all kinds of development opportunities (Gurung, 2014). Education is a key indicator and important component of human development for enhancing capabilities and expanding people's choices which lead to a creative, long and healthy life (Haq, 2005; Pande, 2006; Sen, 2002). Education functions as a powerful agent of social

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transformation and empowers people, and helps to foster cognitive development skills and capacity to perform as full human beings and live with self-respect and dignity (Banu, 2016).

All the people are supposed to have an equal chance of quality of education to capture the desirable sustainable development of a nation. Nevertheless, there is no equal access to education in all the regions regardless of groups like age, gender and other characteristics (Mehrotra and Kapoor, 2009). Recognizing this situation, many international commitments and declarations made significant efforts to narrow down the existing gap between male and female population in education (Somani, 2017). Giving serious attention, the Dakar conference 2000 has also committed to ensure universal access to basic education of high quality. The commitment to gender equality in the Dakar framework for action included in Goal 2: to ensure equality among all children, particularly girls, by 2015 (Hoppers, 2006; Somani, 2017). Similarly, MDGs and SDGs aim to 'achieve universal primary education' and 'ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all' (UNESCO, 2018a, 2018b; United Nations, n.d.). Nepal has also committed to achieve the goals and targets in the successive year periodic plans, annual programmes and budgets (Baral and others, 2017; National Planning Commission, 2016)

People are facing many challenges to get equality and quality in education because of social, cultural and economic factors in the world (UNESCO, 2019). CBS shows that the female population outnumbered the male in Nepal. The common global perspective is that educating girls values the overall development of society (Somani, 2017), encourages them to face challenges (Bhat, 2015), and makes them able to take the right decisions in different circumstances. It is a universal truth that education and work of mothers is an important input for the progress of an individual, society, and nation (Ara, 2012). Moreover, women education helps not only in the development of half of the human resources, but also improves the quality of life at home and outside (Noreen and Khalid, 2012; Suguna, 2011).

CBS showed remarkable achievements of both the male and female population in the field of education over the years. Female literacy has notably increased in the past decades. However, disparities continue to exist across sex and different regions (CBS, 2014; Khanal, 2018). Overall literacy rate has increased to 67 percent in 2011 from 54 percent in 2001. The male literacy rate exceeded the rate of females by 18 percent. The increasing rates

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were 75 percent for males and 57 percent for females in the census year 2011. More gender gap (23%) was found in the literacy rate between male and female in the census 2001 (GC and Shrestha, 2014). Similarly, Nepal Demographic and Health Survey 2016 showed that 89 percent of the male population are literate as compared to 69 percent of female among 15-49 years age group (Ministry of Health Nepal and others, 2017). It exhibited that 71 percent males and 50 percent females were able to have secondary or higher education. The data showed that female are still lagging behind to get equal opportunity of education compared to the males, even though the country has legally committed to provide equal rights to get education in Nepal (Nepal Ministry of Education and UNESCO, 2015).

The Global Partnership for Education (2020) found that in the education sector, for example, the gender gap remains wider in science and technology. This report suggests that girls need to be trained to participate in national development. They remain underrepresented in scientific and technological training. In Senegal for example, though girls account for more than 50 percent of higher education students, they have nominal participation in the area of scientific and technological training.

Gender equality advocates for rights, resources, opportunities and protection equally to the girls and boys. But the male-dominated power structures in society limits the females' rights, well-being, and opportunities (United Nations, 2017). Nepal has predominantly been a patriarchal society where women generally occupy inferior position and subordinate to men in virtually every aspect of life (Bhattarai, 2014). UNESCO (2015) highlights education as the basic human right; and gender equality is fundamental to its full realization. Gender discrimination in education is a kind of violation of their rights (Global Campaign for Education, 2012). Thus, the educational status of population in terms of gender needs to be critically analyzed to identify their educational position in society. In this context, this study tries to analyze the educational achievement (literacy rate, educational attainment, and major fields of study) by sex covering all the provinces of Nepal according to the data from CBS (2002; 2012) relating its findings with Bourdieu's theory of cultural and social reproduction.

### **Theoretical explanation**

The findings of the study are analyzed based on Bourdieu's "cultural and social reproduction" theory which explains that educational institutions are

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functioning to produce and reproduce the existing cultural and social aspects (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu noted that capital (cultural, social, and economic), habitus, and field all work together to generate practices, or social action (Gao, 2011). Cultural capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), is knowledge, skills, education, experiences, and/or connections a person possesses through the course of life that do or do not enable success. He mentions that it can exist in three forms: the embodied, objectified, and the institutionalized. According to him, social capital represents a person's entirety of social relations and one's network of actual or potential resources that can be legitimized by the family, group or class membership.

Capital and habitus of the people play a dominant role in society in producing and reproducing cultural and social practices. Bourdieu explained the study in different disciplines (e.g. education, language, science, and art) which influence the educational achievement and occupational levels. He added that all these studies have the relationships among class, power, and culture and fundamental to social stratification and intergenerational inequality as well (Gao, 2011).

According to Bourdieu, habitus is a set of attitudes and values which encompasses socially imbedded habits, skills, and dispositions. It focuses on our ways of acting, feeling, thinking, and being (Sullivan, 2002). Bourdieu defines habitus as "structured and structuring structure". It is "structured" by one's past and present circumstances, such as family background and educational experiences. It is "structuring" in that one's habitus helps to shape one's present and future practices. It is a "structure" in that it is systematically ordered rather than being haphazard. This "structure" embraces a system of dispositions that generate perceptions, appreciations, and practices (Maton, 2008).

Following Bourdieu, hierarchical classification between male and female that occurs in society results in power imbalance, domination, and symbolic violence in action (Krais and William, 2000). Women in many contexts including Nepal bear a subordinate position that can be seen in many sectors, namely economic, political, social and cultural life of each society (Baker, 1999; Shrestha and Gartoulla, 2015). So far as education is concerned, Gao (2011) argues that society is divided into dominant and dominated groups. In Nepalese society, male occupies a higher level compared to female concerning educational opportunity.

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### **METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on secondary data presented with a descriptive approach. The data were adapted from the CBS (2002), (Table 11: Population 6 years of age and over by literacy status, age, and sex for regions) and CBS (2012) (Table 25: Population aged 5 years and above by literacy status, Table 26: Literate population aged 5 years and above by educational attainment, Table 27: Population above SLC --National examination of grade 10 passed by major fields of study). Districts were selected province-wise, and the related data (literacy, educational attainment, and major fields of the study) were calculated by each district in all the provinces by sex. The essential data were calculated using Microsoft Excel. The data have been analyzed and discussed under three themes as follows.

### **Result and discussion**

#### *Literacy status*

The 2001 and 2011 censuses defined literate person in terms of having the ability to read and write in any language with understanding and do simple arithmetic calculations. Literacy was measured for the population of 6 years and above in the census of 2001 and 5 years and above in the 2011 census (GC and Shrestha, 2014). The overall literacy rate is in increasing trend in Nepal. The literacy rate was increased by about 23 percent from 2001 to 2011 census.

The percentage change in the literacy rate of women shown in the two censuses is higher than men, however it failed to eradicate the gender gap (Hill and King, 1995). The female literacy rate of Province two, Sudurpaschim, and Karnali provinces remained below the national level. However, the change in percentage seems to be the highest in these provinces in the case of female, and similar case is found in male in the Karnali and the Sudurpashim Provinces. The serious remarkable issue is that substantial gap appears between male and female in literacy rate in Province two. The data show similar situations in all the provinces. Despite the fact that education is a universal human right, female faced barriers to equal participation in education (UNESCO, 2018a).

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**Table 1**  
**Percent distribution of literacy rate by sex, 2001-2011**

Provinces	Census years						Percent change (2001-2011)		
	2001			2011			Total	Male	Female
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female			
1	58.3	68.5	48.3	71.2	79.3	63.9	22.1	15.8	32.3
2	40.9	52.6	28.2	49.5	60.1	38.9	21.0	14.3	37.9
<b>Bagmati</b>	62.1	72.8	51.2	74.9	82.8	67.0	20.6	13.7	30.9
<b>Gandaki</b>	60.1	71.5	50.0	73.9	82.8	66.5	23.0	15.8	33.0
<b>Lumbini</b>	53.8	64.6	43.4	66.3	75.3	58.4	23.2	16.6	34.6
<b>Karnali</b>	47.6	60.5	34.6	62.5	72.8	52.8	31.3	20.3	52.6
<b>Sudurpashim</b>	48.2	64.1	32.8	63.5	76.4	51.9	31.7	19.2	58.2
<b>Nepal</b>	<b>53.7</b>	<b>65.1</b>	<b>42.5</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>75.1</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>15.4</b>	<b>35.1</b>

*Adapted from CBS (2002; 2012)*

The data reveal the fact that the literacy rate of people in Province two, Karnali, and Sudurpashim Provinces need to be increased to meet the commitment of SDG 4 which aims to ‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education for all’ and eliminate ‘gender disparities in education’ (United Nations, n.d.). And girls’ education needs to be focused because the lower level of education on female can have a negative impact on district-level GDP per capita and the nation’s prosperity (Dahal, 2011).

The scenario in the literacy gap between male and female may prevail in the theory of cultural reproduction developed by French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. According to this theory, the educational system is operated by the dominant class, and they transmit their norms and values from person to person or society to society. He mentioned though the power relations that are not implied in a formal definition of communication, educational institutions and pedagogic action tries to impose instilling of their knowledge or values upon the dominated class. He regards it as a kind of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). This theory seems to be realistic in the context of Nepal. Though the government and non-government organizations have been making efforts for education for all regardless of

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groups including gender, the data showed the continuation of a significant gender gap in education.

### **Educational attainment**

This section focuses on the level of the educational achieved from beginning to post graduation including non-formal education among the literate people from gender perspective. More females attained the school up to lower secondary level but their percentage is decreasing as the level of education increased in comparison to the males in Nepal.

Among the literate people in Nepal, around two-fifth of population completed primary education, one-fifth of them completed lower secondary level. Similarly, about one-tenth completed secondary level, and SLC and equivalent each. All provinces have more or less similar situation in terms of ratio. The completed level of education of beginners and primary level is comparatively higher in female than male especially in Province two, Karnali Province and Sudurpashim Province. However, more gap between male and female in these provinces exists in the higher level of education in comparison to the other provinces. It might have occurred due to the early marriage of girls which is the cause of drop-out or lack of participation in educational attainment (UNFPA, 2017).

Only nominal number of people (2.8%) seem to have attained the graduation and post-graduation level and above (1.0%) in Nepal. The people of Bagmati Province were able to achieve the result higher than the average national result in the graduate equivalent and above levels. But SLC graduates from province 1, Bagmati, and Gandaki Provinces have achieved higher result than the national average results (Table 2). Among the results on average, the females' achievement seemed poorer compared to males the causes of which might be the drop out of girls during the study at higher level in education. This condition may lead the women to continue to face the challenges from taking advantages in various opportunities in society (UNESCO, 2018a). Other causes of this situation may be the burden of household work for the females (Khanal, 2018; Sabates and others, 2010) and the belief that there is less value in educating girls in comparison to the boys (Rueckert, 2019).

The situation of educational attainment of male and female population at different levels between at the national level and provinces can be linked with Bourdieu's theory of 'social reproduction' relating the 'habitus' and

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'field'. According to his theory, habitus encompasses socially imbedded skills and dispositions. Supporting this theory, the gap between male and female from beginners to postgraduate and equivalent and above among particular provinces prevails the continuation of the habitus of male-dominated embodied ideology and result appeared in the field (society). The rooted social and cultural norms and values and the practices of gender socialization in the society are associated with the poor achievement of education for girls compared with the male population in various provinces. The result of education attainment reveals the reproduction of social structures and systems.

**Table 2**  
**Sex-wise distribution of literate persons by completed level of educational attainment, 2011**

Area	Beginners	Primary (1-5)	Lower secondary (6-8)	Secondary (9-10)	S.L.C. and equivalent	Intermediate & equivalent	Graduate and equivalent	Post graduate equivalent & above	Others	Non-formal education	Level not stated	Total
<b>Nepal</b>												
Total	4.0	39.0	20.3	11.5	10.2	6.4	2.8	1.0	0.1	4.2	0.5	100.0
Male	3.9	38.1	20.0	11.8	10.6	6.8	3.5	1.3	0.1	3.5	0.5	100.0
Female	4.1	40.2	20.6	11.3	9.7	5.9	2.1	0.5	0.1	4.9	0.5	100.0
<b>Province 1</b>												
Total	3.3	37.5	21.2	13.3	11.9	5.1	2.0	0.5	0.0	4.8	0.4	100.0

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Male	3.4	37.5	20.6	13.0	11.8	5.4	2.6	0.8	0.0	4.6	0.3	100.0
Female	3.3	37.5	21.9	13.7	12.1	4.7	1.3	0.2	0.0	5.0	0.4	100.0
<b>Province 2</b>												
Total	3.0	44.9	20.0	11.0	9.4	5.9	2.6	0.6	0.2	1.5	0.9	100.0
Male	2.7	41.6	20.1	12.1	10.3	6.6	3.3	0.8	0.2	0.9		100.0
Female	3.3	50.0	19.8	9.4	8.0	4.8	1.5	0.3	0.3	1.0		100.0
<b>Bagmati Province</b>												
Total	3.4	30.8	17.9	11.2	12.4	10.6	5.7	2.4	0.1	5.0	0.5	100.0
Male	3.3	30.1	17.5	11.0	12.7	10.8	6.5	3.1	0.1	4.3	0.5	100.0
Female	3.5	31.6	18.4	11.4	11.9	10.5	4.8	1.6	0.1	5.8	0.5	100.0
<b>Gandaki Province</b>												
Total	3.8	37.6	22.0	12.3	10.4	5.6	2.0	0.6	0.1	5.2	0.3	100.0
Male	4.0	37.6	21.0	12.2	11.0	5.9	2.6	1.0	0.1	4.3	0.3	100.0
Female	3.6	37.7	23.1	12.4	9.8	5.3	1.4	0.3	0.1	6.1	0.4	100.0
<b>Lumbini Province</b>												
Total	4.7	43.0	21.3	10.9	8.4	4.7	1.8	0.5	0.1	4.2	0.4	100.0

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Male	4.7	42.5	21.2	11.2	8.6	5.1	2.3	0.8	0.1	3.3	0.3	100.0
Female	4.7	43.7	21.3	10.5	8.2	4.3	1.2	0.2	0.1	5.3	0.4	100.0
<b>Karnali Province</b>												
Total	5.6	46.7	21.1	9.9	7.0	3.9	1.0	0.3	0.1	3.9	0.4	100.0
Male	5.1	44.4	21.4	10.8	8.2	4.6	1.5	0.4	0.1	3.1	0.4	100.0
Female	6.3	49.6	20.6	8.7	5.6	3.0	0.5	0.1	0.1	5.1	0.5	100.0
<b>Sudurpashim Province</b>												
Total	6.3	44.6	20.8	10.9	6.7	4.7	1.5	0.5	0.1	3.6	0.4	100.0
Male	5.9	42.6	21.3	11.7	7.5	5.4	2.0	0.7	0.1	2.6	0.4	100.0
Female	6.9	47.3	20.2	9.8	5.7	3.7	0.8	0.2	0.1	4.9	0.4	100.0

Source: CBS (2012)

### Major fields of study

Social and Behavioral Science, Business and Administration, Humanities and Arts, Education, and Science seem to be the major fields of the study of both males and females at the national level in order and it appeared to be similar in the provincial level as well. The good news is that the involvement of females at higher level of education is increasing in comparison to the past years in Nepal (Table 1). The data (Table 3) show higher preference to the health sector by the females in comparison to the males is in all provinces. Health is studied by 3.4 percent female and 1.9 percent male at the national level. Females have higher participation in the Karnali Province and Sudurpashim Province than in others in this subject.

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Business and Administration, Science, Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction, Law, Mathematics and Statistics, Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery, and Computing are especially male preferred subjects in Nepal. Prakasam and others (2019) and Sahoo and Klasen (2018) clearly showed gender polarization between humanities (female preferred) and science, medicine, engineering, and other professional courses (male preferred).

The choice of the major fields of the study is influenced by various circumstances including access to college in the home town, confirmation of security condition outside home, cost bearing capacity of parents and their willingness to invest, and tradition to choose the major subject by sex (Karki, 2014), job market in the country, etc. The Engineering stream is chosen mainly in Bagmati Province and Province two; and Mathematics is studied by more people in Province two, Gandaki, Karnali, and Sudurpashim provinces. Higher attraction of males in the subjects like mathematics, engineering and science in Province two may be the reason of receiving more amount of dowry as studied by Karki (2014) and Mahato (2016). They showed a positive relationship between education and dowry demand where doctors, engineers and bankers are given more dowry in comparison to the people in other jobs.

The findings of the study are supported by Bourdieu's concept of cultural and social reproduction in education. The selection of the subjects to be studied seems to be influenced by the cultural tradition, and social norms and practices in particular places; as a result, resource persons as manpower are produced and reproduced as indirectly guided by the culture and society. The involvement rate of females in various technical and professional subjects is poorer compared to the males in most subjects. It can cause power imbalance and domination in terms of gender in society. Bourdieu termed this situation as "symbolic violence".

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**Table 3**  
**Percent distribution of population at SLC level and above by major field of study by sex, 2011**

Areas	Humanities and Arts	Business and Administration	Education	Science	Health	Engineering, Manufacturing & Construction	Law	Social & Behavioral Science	Mathematics & Statistics	Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery	Computing	Journalism & Information	Others	Not Stated	Total
<b>Nepal</b>															
Total	23.5	25.0	16.9	7.8	2.5	1.8	1.1	4.0	0.9	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.1	15.3	100
Male	22.3	26.7	13.7	9.3	1.9	2.5	1.5	4.1	0.3	0.6	0.5	0.1	0.1	15.2	100
Female	25.4	22.3	22.3	5.3	3.4	0.6	0.5	3.8	0.0	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.1	15.4	100
<b>Province 1</b>															
Total	28.1	23.1	19.6	5.8	1.4	1.0	1.4	3.4	0.6	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.3	14.4	100
Male	27.9	25.5	15.1	7.2	1.3	1.4	1.9	3.8	0.9	0.6	0.4	0.0	0.3	13.8	100
Female	28.5	19.3	26.8	3.5	1.6	0.2	0.6	2.9	0.2	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.4	15.3	100
<b>Province 2</b>															
Total	19.1	15.3	20.8	9.9	2.5	1.4	0.9	2.6	1.8	0.5	0.3	0.0	0.1	24.9	100
Male	18.3	17.0	17.5	11.6	2.3	1.8	1.1	2.6	2.2	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.1	24.7	100
Female	21.1	10.9	28.9	5.7	3.2	0.3	0.4	2.7	0.8	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	25.5	100
<b>Bagmati Province</b>															

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Total	22.6	33.8	10.0	9.3	2.5	2.7	1.2	4.2	0.7	0.4	0.5	0.2	0.0	11.8	100
Male	20.4	36.0	7.4	10.8	1.7	4.0	1.7	4.1	0.9	0.5	0.7	0.2	0.1	11.6	100
Female	25.7	30.6	13.9	7.0	3.7	0.9	0.6	4.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.0	12.2	100
<b>Gandaki Province</b>															
Total	24.8	20.4	21.4	6.0	2.1	1.3	1.0	3.7	1.4	0.6	0.2	0.0	0.0	16.9	100
Male	24.7	23.0	15.5	7.9	1.8	2.0	1.5	4.2	1.9	0.8	0.3	0.0	0.0	16.3	100
Female	25.0	16.8	29.7	3.4	2.6	0.3	0.4	2.9	0.7	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	17.7	100
<b>Lumbini Province</b>															
Total	25.1	18.2	22.1	6.2	2.6	0.9	1.0	3.9	1.3	0.6	0.2	0.0	0.0	17.9	100
Male	25.1	20.4	17.2	7.8	2.0	1.3	1.4	4.3	1.8	0.9	0.3	0.0	0.0	17.8	100
Female	25.1	14.7	30.0	3.6	3.7	0.2	0.4	3.3	0.5	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	18.2	100
<b>Karnali Province</b>															
Total	21.3	6.6	41.3	3.1	4.7	0.6	0.9	4.9	2.0	0.5	0.2	0.0	0.0	13.9	100
Male	21.8	7.4	39.0	3.9	3.8	0.8	1.1	5.2	2.6	0.6	0.3	0.0	0.0	13.4	100
Female	20.3	4.5	46.4	1.4	6.7	0.1	0.3	4.0	0.8	0.3	0.1	0.0	0.0	15.1	100
<b>Sudurpashim Province</b>															
Total	25.4	14.4	26.3	4.5	3.9	0.7	0.7	7.4	1.8	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	14.3	100
Male	25.0	16.4	23.2	5.6	2.9	0.9	0.9	7.7	2.3	0.4	0.2	0.0	0.0	14.3	100
Female	26.5	9.8	33.2	2.2	6.0	0.2	0.2	6.5	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.0	14.3	100

*Adapted from CBS (2012)*

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### **Conclusion**

Though Nepal has made significant progress in education over the last twenty years, women yet are unable to enjoy the same opportunities in education as men. The achievement of a higher level of education like Post Graduate Equivalent and above seems lower compared with the achievement of lower-grades education for both males and females in Nepal. It may be the result of peoples' higher priority to employment and improving economic status than getting higher level of education. Only a few number of females completed higher level of education in comparison to the males.

The gender gap in education seems highly challenging in the case of women's empowerment and their quality of life. It has not only become an individual issue but also a nation's socio-economic prosperity. Gender gap, especially in higher education, may be caused by females' reproductive role and household work, which has compelled them to spend more time in these fields. There can be a penalized condition if females get a higher level of education, especially in the Terai regions where they are compelled to give more dowry for their grooms with a higher level of education.

Although the gender gap between males and females has been improved in comparison to previous censuses in many geographical areas, the change does not seem to have been significant. Hence, the gender-related barriers experienced in achieving higher level education are further intensive areas to explore for ensuring inclusive and equitable quality of education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all – which is linked to one of the important aims of SDGs. To overcome the existing gap, allocation, and implementation of gender-responsive programmes can be recommended.

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