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Women Empowerment in Higher Education in Nepal

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Keywords Abstract Women empowerment This paper attempts to address women's empowerment in higher education in Nepal. This is a review paper based higher education systematic review on a systematic review of women's empowerment through education. The dictionary definition of empowerment google scholar refers to giving power and status to an individual or exclusion inclusion criteria group in a particular situation. Empowerment enables them to increase access to opportunities without limitations, such as in education, profession, and lifestyle. This paper uses a systematic review method to focus on the role of education in women's empowerment. For this purpose, nine articles were selected for systematic review from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses [PRISMA] model. The review materials that focused on the different dimensions of women's empowerment, both theoretically and methodologically, were considered for systematic review. The systematic review results reveal that education is a precondition for women's empowerment. However, most of the conclusions were based on census data covering women's literacy rates, and their findings did not explicitly mention the indicators of women's studies. Only a few studies assessed the dimensions of women's empowerment, such as personal, economic, social, and political dimensions

Introduction

Women's empowerment improves historically marginalised and neglected women's social, political, and economic standing (Engida, 2021; UNFPA, 1994). The capacity for financial independence or control over employment possibilities, property rights, voting rights, and decision-making is known as empowerment. Creating fair chances and enabling women to engage in the urgent and transformative education movement is known as women's empowerment in higher education. It acknowledges the intrinsic worth of women's opinions, experiences, and viewpoints in influencing society and education. To empower women in higher education, barriers must be removed, structural biases must be addressed, and gender equality must be promoted in all spheres of academic life, including access, representation, leadership, and decisionmaking (Bhat, 2015).

initiatives to support women's Manv empowerment in higher education have recently been implemented by institutions and groups worldwide. These initiatives include financial aid, scholarships, grants, networking opportunities specifically targeted at women, mentorship programs and networking opportunities to support women's academic and professional development. Additionally, advocacy and awareness activities have made it feasible to cease discriminatory practices, create inclusive environments, and challenge gender stereotypes (Bhat, 2015).

In many developing nations, like Nepal, the advancement of women in higher education has become crucial. Globally, companies and societies have seen substantial shifts in viewpoint, which has led to a stronger focus on gender equality and the advancement of women's rights in education (Bhat, 2015). A growing movement toward women's empowerment in higher education has resulted from realising the great potential and contributions that women can make to academia, research, and society at large (Mahsud & Ali, 2020). Various significant challenges, including gender disparities in educational opportunity and access, have affected the focus on women's empowerment in higher education. Many initiatives to support women's empowerment in higher education have recently been implemented by institutions and groups worldwide. These initiatives include financial aid, scholarships,

grants, networking opportunities specifically targeted at women, mentorship programs and networking opportunities to support women's academic and professional development. Additionally, advocacy and awareness activities have made it feasible to cease discriminatory practices, create inclusive environments, and challenge gender stereotypes (Bhat, 2015).

Because of terms like capacity, freedom, options, and so forth, critics noted that the term empowerment becomes diluted to the point of being completely ambiguous. However, empowerment has been greatly aided by education, awareness, literacy, and training (Rahman, 2013; Bayeh, 2016; Lecoutere, 2017). Engida (2021) used this model to analyze the role of education in women's empowerment, covering personal, relational, and social empowerment at various levels. Huis, Hansen, Otten, and Lensink (2017) proposed a three-dimensional model of women's empowerment integrated into microfinance.

Women's higher education advancement in Nepal has advanced significantly in recent years, setting the foundation for beneficial social reforms. To promote gender equality and foster women's participation in all aspects of life, including higher education, Nepal has been working as a developing country (Government of Nepal, Ministry of Women, Children, and Social Welfare, 2009). The creation of legislative and policy frameworks that heavily emphasise gender equality is one of the primary initiatives encouraging women's empowerment in higher education in Nepal. The Nepalese government has implemented several measures to boost female enrollment and retention in higher education institutions because it recognizes

the value of empowering women through education (Asian Development Bank, 2010).

Expanding financial aid and scholarship programs for women is another noteworthy trend. These programs remove financial obstacles to higher education while encouraging young women from underprivileged homes to do so. Gifted women now have the chance to further their education and give back to their communities because of scholarships like the Nepal Bidhya Bhusan Scholarship, Fulbright Scholarship, and several other grants (Asian Development Bank, 2015). They demonstrate the dedication of the authorities, the community, and the educational institutions. The possibility for women to thrive and feel more powerful in higher education has been made possible by increasing enrollment, scholarships, gender-responsive policies, and institutional support to fix the issues, give women equal opportunities to participate fully, assume leadership roles, and make significant contributions.

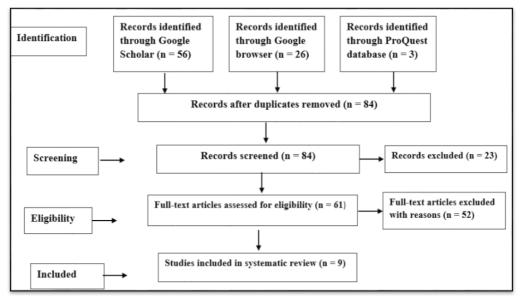
Materials and Method

This paper uses a mixed-methods research technique with a descriptive research designthe reviews of women's empowerment in higher education provided by secondary data sources. The review materials were searched from archives and digital sources. The systematic literature review method was applied to prepare this paper. The summarizing and evaluation of related documents are a systematic review (Petticrew & Roberts, 2008; Tondeur et al., 2012). The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) were used to choose the review materials. According to Alonso-Garcia, Aznar-Diaz, Caceres-Reche, Trujillo-Torres, and Romero-Rodriguez (2019), the PRISMA entails defining research questions, the inclusion and exclusion criteria, searching databases, refining collected data, and extracting information from the relevant data based on research questions.

Data sources

The secondary data sources were used to select review materials in this paper. For this purpose, nine review materials were collected from Google Scholar, the Pro-Quest database, and the Google browser. Keywords used search related to women's empowerment, higher education, and the role of education for women's empowerment.

PRISMA schematic diagram



Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

The study focused on women's empowerment through education; English-language literature was chosen for inclusion, and a full article provided the pace for the systematic review. These criteria were employed to assess the materials. The exclusion criteria also prevented the study's full paper from being published and prevented the literature from addressing the dimensions of women's empowerment via education in primary or secondary data.

Data Collection

Data were collected using the PRISMA technique, which comprises four phases: identification of the articles using keywords, screening out duplicates using inclusion and exclusion criteria, and article analysis to answer the research question (suitability). In the appropriateness phase, the research question was used to filter the research publications. This procedure disregarded research that lacked a methodology and relied on secondary data. The research question was examined in only the articles that made the shortlist. The schematic diagram in the appendix illustrates how the PRISMA model gathers data.

Results and Discussions

Recently, Nepal has gradually improved women's access to higher education and promoted women's empowerment in academia. The government and nongovernment organizations have put initiatives into place to address gender inequality and promote it in educational institutions. The rise in female enrollment in higher education can exemplify a noteworthy accomplishment. The percentage of women obtaining undergraduate and graduate degrees has increased noticeably over time. The National Central Bureau of Statistics [CBS] states that 76.3 percent of people aged five and older nationwide are literate, which comprises an average literacy rate of 69.4 percent for women and 83.6 percent for men in the 2021 census. This figure seems to be promising for the development of women's empowerment in higher education.

The government has also promulgated affirmative action laws, scholarships, and grants to implement the provisions of the Constitution of Nepal to encourage the participation of female students in higher education. These programs are designed to lower financial obstacles and provide equal opportunity for women to pursue academic goals. Nevertheless, difficulties and inequities continue to exist despite these encouraging achievements. There are gender disparities in some academic fields, with women underrepresented in fields like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). These discrepancies may be influenced by sociocultural elements, such as society's expectations and established gender roles.

In addition, there is still a problem with gender-based violence in higher education institutions, including sexual harassment and discrimination. By establishing grievanceredressed systems and encouraging gendersensitive campuses, efforts are being made to solve these concerns. The government should keep implementing policies and programs that address gender imbalances, offer equal opportunities, and foster supportive settings for female students and faculty members if we want to increase women's empowerment in higher education. It is also required to promote gender-responsive pedagogy; increasing the number of women in leadership roles and developing a campus culture that respects and appreciates gender equality should be the main goals of ongoing initiatives. Thus, women's empowerment in higher education in Nepal should be incorporated into the changing nature of societal advancement.

Dimensions of Women's Empowerment

In this paper, "dimension refers to a measurable variable of a woman's empowerment. It provides a way to describe different characteristics of women's empowerment. Dimensions help to understand and analyze complex systems by breaking them down into distinct elements of women's empowerment, individually or concerning each other. Women's empowerment covers a variety of interconnected dimensions that help build a more just and inclusive society. The various programs and policies support improving the dimensions of women's empowerment. They are discussed as follows:

Economic Dimension: This dimension focuses on women's economic empowerment, including access to resources, income generation. employment opportunities, entrepreneurship, financial inclusion, and economic decision-making. The Women's Entrepreneurship Development Program (WEDP), launched by the Government of Nepal and NGOs, is one instance of women's economic empowerment in Nepal. The initiative strives to support and promote women's entrepreneurship by giving them access to markets, mentorship, financial aid, and training. Women in Nepal are given the tools to take charge of their financial futures, break down obstacles to entrepreneurship, and contribute to economic growth and development through programs like the Women's Entrepreneurship Development Program. Such programs are essential in fostering an atmosphere that supports women's economic empowerment because they address the particular difficulties they confront and give them the tools and assistance they need to be successful business owners.

Training in subjects like financial literacy, marketing tactics, company planning, and product development is part of this. The program provides women with the skills and information they need to launch and run their businesses successfully. A crucial component of the program is financial aid. Women business owners can access loans, grants, and subsidies to start or grow their companies. Due to inadequate collateral or discriminatory lending practices, women frequently encounter challenges accessing traditional sources of financing. These financial resources aid in overcoming these obstacles.

Social Dimension: The social dimension emphasizes women's empowerment in social relationships, institutions, and norms. It includes gender roles, social expectations, cultural practices, social standards, and attitudes that affect women's status and agency in society.

The Women's Empowerment Program (WEP) is being carried out by government and non-government organizations (NGOs) to increase social empowerment in Nepal. The main objectives of this program are to confront societal norms, dispel gender stereotypes, and advance gender equality in local communities. To combat dominant social conventions and attitudes that support gender inequality, the WEP runs awareness campaigns and sensitization workshops. These programs seek to increase community understanding of women's rights, genderbased violence, and the value of gender equality among men and boys. The initiative fosters community-wide changes in attitudes and behaviours by encouraging discussion and education.

The WEP provides chances for women to strengthen their leadership skills at the local level. Training sessions, workshops, and mentorship programs develop women's leadership, confidence, and decision-making skills. This enables women to actively engage in decision-making processes and assume leadership roles in community groups, local governing institutions, and social projects.

The program supports initiatives to mobilize the community to build platforms for women's voices to be heard. Women can work together to address social concerns, fight for their rights, and carry out community-driven initiatives by organizing into groups and networks. Women can change social dynamics and combat discriminatory behaviours by banding together and acting as a group.

These examples demonstrate how Nepal's Women's Empowerment Program contributes to women's social empowerment by challenging discriminatory social norms, promoting women's leadership, fostering community mobilization, engaging men and boys, and addressing gender-based violence. Working at the grassroots level, such programs help transform societal attitudes and practices, leading to more equitable and inclusive communities.

Political Dimension: The political dimension addresses women's empowerment in political participation, representation, leadership, and decision-making. It involves women's access to political institutions, their involvement in policy-making processes, and their ability to influence and shape political agendas.

The adoption of affirmative action policies, such as the reservation of seats for women in elected bodies, is one illustration of the political empowerment of women in Nepal. According to the Nepalese Constitution, women must hold at least one-third of the seats in all levels of government, including local, provincial, and federal ones. By allowing them to actively engage in decision-making processes and contribute to the creation of policy, this constitutional provision has considerably boosted the representation of women in political institutions. Women now have direct access to political power through the designated seats, giving them more chances to advocate for their rights, voice their concerns, and shape policy agendas.

Thanks to these protected seats, Women have secured jobs as elected representatives at all government levels. Since they may now influence legislation that deals with women's rights, gender equality, and other social issues, there are now more visible and active women in political leadership positions. Beyond reserved seats, women in Nepal are also politically empowered. To improve women's political abilities, knowledge, and self-assurance, capacity-building projects and programs are being launched. These programs offer instruction in various skills, including negotiating, public speaking, and strategic planning, enabling women to participate in politics successfully.

Educational Dimension: The educational dimension focuses on women's access to quality education, the elimination of gender disparities in education, the promotion of girls' education, and women's participation and achievements in educational institutions.

The Girls' Education Program, which the government and several organizations implemented to encourage girls' enrollment and retention in schools, enhance educational outcomes, and address gender gaps in education, illustrates how women in Nepal are becoming empowered via schooling. By giving girls access to equitable educational opportunities, resolving gender inequities, and fostering an atmosphere that supports their academic success, the Girls' Education Program in Nepal hopes to empower girls. These initiatives help remove obstacles, encourage girls' enrollment and retention in schools, and support their academic success and aspirations.

In Nepal, efforts are made to guarantee that girls have equal access to education. This involves constructing schools in isolated and underserved regions, ensuring access to transportation, and removing financial obstacles by providing scholarships, stipends, and incentives to girls from underprivileged families.

The curriculum recognizes and addresses gender biases and stereotypes. It attempts to deliver inclusive and gender-sensitive content to empower girls, challenge social conventions, and promote equitable participation and opportunities for girls in all academic disciplines of study.

A learning atmosphere that is safe and encouraging must be established if girls are to be empowered through education. Actions are taken to stop and handle sexual harassment, gender-based violence, and discrimination in schools. Sensitization of gender equality and the value of fostering an atmosphere that supports girls' education is provided to school management committees, teachers, and students.

Two essential aspects of community engagement are confronting harmful traditional practices that prevent women from accessing education and raising awareness. To promote girls' education and remove obstacles, including early marriage, child labour, and gender biases, community engagement initiatives work with parents, community leaders, and local stakeholders. **Health Dimension**: The health dimension involves women's physical and mental well-being, including access to healthcare services, reproductive health rights, maternal health, prevention of gender-based violence, and overall health outcomes.

Legal Dimension: The legal dimension emphasizes women's rights and access to justice. It includes legal frameworks that protect women's rights, eliminate discriminatory practices, and provide mechanisms for addressing gender-based violence, discrimination, and harassment.

The personal, economic, social, and political components are considered in the study of women's empowerment. For instance, Sundaram, Sekar, and Subburaj (2014) and Parrey and Sthapak (2020) talked about the broad outlines of the components of women's empowerment. However, other studies (Mehsud & Ali, 2020; Menon & Sharma, 2020; Segovia-Perez, Laguna-Sanchez, & Fuente-Cabrero, 2019) concentrated on additional aspects of empowerment such as autonomy and independence, participation in the decision-making process, control over household resources, freedom of movement and social mobility, increased self-confidence, and perceptions of personal capabilities. (Jahan, Hussain, Ahmed, and Moshrur-ul-Alam (2016);Prajapati & Prajapati, 2016). Additionally, choices about reproductive health and awareness of the rights and violations of women are significant factors (Jahan, Hussain, Ahmed, & Moshrurul-Alam, 2016).

Women's Empowerment in Higher Education

Women's empowerment in Nepal's higher education system is demonstrated by the Women's Scholarship Program, which aims to increase access to higher education for women

and support their academic achievements. This program offers financial assistance and scholarships to female students so they can pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees in various fields. By removing the financial barriers that typically keep women from enrolling in higher education, the Women's Scholarship Program strives to help more women. It offers scholarships to academically women from disadvantaged gifted backgrounds who may not have the financial means to cover higher education costs. The scholarships cover tuition, living expenses, and other educational expenditures, removing financial obstacles and allowing women to concentrate on their studies. The initiative encourages more women to enrol in colleges and universities and seek degrees in various subjects by providing financial aid. As a result, the gender gap in higher education is reduced, and gender equality is promoted in academic settings. It also allows women to follow their passions, develop skills, and contribute to their chosen industries.

According to a thorough review of the data, there is a connection between women's empowerment and higher education. Through a qualitative analysis, Mahsud and Ali (2020) found that higher education and women's empowerment at the individual and family levels positively correlated. They admit that metropolitan women have profited more than rural areas. To summarize their findings, Prajapati and Prajapati (2016) list the benefits of education for women: improved life, dignity and honour, justice, the freedom to choose a profession of her choosing, and poverty reduction. Similarly, Noreen and Khalid (2012) outlined how women's independence has increased because of higher education. According to Jahan, Hossain, Ahmed, and Moshrur-Ul-Alam (2016), women with postgraduate degrees had more control over household resources, enjoyed greater social

mobility, were more decisive in family decisions, had more decision-making power regarding reproductive health issues, and had more knowledge of the relevant problems.

Challenges and Barriers to Women's Empowerment

This paper discusses the challenges and barriers to women's empowerment in Nepal. It identifies several factors contributing to these challenges, including gender discrimination, lack of education, economic inequality, violence against women, cultural norms, and lack of political representation.

Stereotypes and gender bias: Stereotypes and gender bias can harm women's chances of success in higher education. These prejudices can influence peer interactions, faculty expectations, and admission procedures. Universities and colleges should support gender equality by implementing gender-responsive policies, conducting gender sensitization training for professors and staff, and launching awareness campaigns.

Limited Access to Resources: Women may have financial hardships and less access to resources like technology, textbooks, and tuition needed for higher education. This obstacle can be lessened by offering financial aid, scholarships, and grants primarily geared toward women. Universities can also set up resource hubs where female students can access technology, study materials, and support services.

Gender-Based Discrimination and Harassment: Women may be discouraged from seeking higher education by genderbased discrimination and harassment, which can foster hostile circumstances. Universities should put Solid policies and processes in place to stop and deal with harassment and discrimination based on gender. This obstacle can be overcome, and a welcoming learning atmosphere for women can be created by creating safe spaces, support networks, and counselling services.

Women frequently struggle to strike a balance between their academic goals and home obligations, as well as societal expectations. Flexible educational programs, childcare services, and family-friendly laws can support women in juggling their many responsibilities. Another way to overcome this obstacle is to promote a work-life balance culture and shared duties among the staff, instructors, and students.

Lack of Support Networks: Women's empowerment in higher education may be hampered by a lack of access to support networks and chances for networking and collaboration. A feeling of community can be fostered, and opportunities for mentorship, teamwork, and career advancement can be provided by establishing women's support groups, professional associations, and networking events.

Removing these obstacles necessitates a multifaceted strategy combining academic institutions, public officials, and the general public. It calls for the adoption of gender-responsive policies, the provision of funding and mentorship assistance, the creation of inclusive and secure learning environments, and the combating of gender prejudices and stereotypes. Higher education institutions can enable women to fully engage, excel, and contribute to academic and professional domains by actively trying to remove these barriers.

Conclusion

The concept of women's empowerment is intricate and multifaceted; it considers several social, economic, and political variables. A key component of women's empowerment is education, which gives women the knowledge, abilities, and confidence they need to participate fully in society and make wise life decisions. This essay explores several aspects of women's empowerment concerning education. It emphasizes giving girls and women equal access to education addressing obstacles. while including poverty, prejudice, and cultural norms. It also highlights the value of a high-quality education, which includes a pertinent gender-sensitive curriculum, teaching techniques, and enough resources and facilities. Women must enhance their reading, numeracy, critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills and participate in society. This paper concludes that women with higher education degrees can participate in white-collar income-generating activities compared to illiterate women. The level of education is correlated to participation in social, political and developmental activities. Women's education and employment also change their household, social, and economic status in society and decision-making.

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