



Trends of Female Education at Higher Levels

Surya Prasad Adhikari, PhD

Central Department of Education, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-2927-9429>

Email: suryapdad@gmail.com

Shanta Upadhya Adhikari, Corresponding author

Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2160-216X>

Email: adhikarishanta010@gmail.com

Keywords

Empowerment, female enrollment, educational level, regional disparities

Abstract

Higher education is one of the most important tools for the development of any nation. This article examines the trends of female participation in higher education in Nepal. The study is based on secondary sources of data obtained from the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey, and the University Grants Commission. It uses descriptive and analytical methods to explore enrollment patterns across universities, level of study, ecological belt, and province. The results show a significant increase female enrollments in higher education, increasing from 247,370 in 2019/20 to 358,140 in 2023/24. Tribhuvan University continues to dominate female enrollment, while newly established universities and specialized institutions also gradual progress. Regional differences remain noticeable, with Bagmati Province and the Hill region having the highest females' enrollments, whereas the Mountain region and Karnali Province hold up behind due to remoteness and limit institutional access. The study reveals that Nepal is shifting towards educational inclusiveness and gender equality, through challenges remain. The findings of this study further highlight female enrollments at the bachelor's and master's levels is increasing. However, in MPhil and PhD programs is still low. To encourage equitable access and sustainable progress of all academic levels as well as newly established higher education, it is necessary to implement, it is essential gender sensitive policies, scholarship programs and supportive learning environments. Overall, the study reveals positive progress of female higher education enrollments in Nepal but continued efforts are needed to ensure regional and provincial balance and gender equality in all levels of higher education.

Background

Education is one of the most important indicators for women. It plays central role for positive development of society. Higher education is widely viewed as a driving force for social progress and national development. Globally, many creativities have been presented to empower women through education. In developing countries, including Nepal, promoting women's participation in higher education is essential. It plays central role to development human capital, critical thinking, innovation, which is essential for economic and social development of a country. The contribution of female education not only for social cultural and economic development of nation but also promotes empowerments for female, develop life skills, and sustainable development of nation (Uddin & Khan, 2024). Higher education institution is increasing in Nepal. The increasing the number of higher education institutions in Nepal, also reflects positive female enrollment rate of higher education simultaneously (Acharya, 2021). Higher education is one of the best tools for also women empowerment by developing knowledge, skills, confidence, and capacity building, resulting in the role of decision power over their future. So, the programs, like the girls' education program, have been implemented to increase girls' enrollment and holding. Which leads to improved learning outcomes and reduces gender gaps. (Koirala, 2023). Female education, especially at higher level, is basic for women empowerment and societal development. Higher education not only supports to build confidence and increase awareness for female but also improves their social and economic status by creating employment opportunities and encouragement upward mobility. Thus, higher education is essential tools for women empowerment for achieving inclusive and sustainable development of nation (Uddin et al., 2021). Female's participation in higher

education is a key step toward achieving gender equality in both the economy and society. The higher education system of any country plays a vital role in its overall development of country. Therefore, it is considered as a basic tools for everyone, but it grips special significance for female as it enhances their skills, empowers them, and helps them to contribute meaningfully to national progress (Ghosh & Kundu, 2021).

The role and responsibilities of females are important in Nepalese society. However, females are facing many problems due to patriarchy and are seen as suitable only for caring roles, not for leadership. This belief is also found in education. When leadership positions are available, women are ignored and men are given preference in colleges and universities (Dhobi, 2025). Educating women brings significant social, economic, and political benefits. Furthermore, they have to get authority of experience, less domestic violence, and also participate more in household and economic decision-making, which promotes equality and ensures equal rights and opportunities. Education also enhances female cognitive abilities, improving women's quality of life and enabling better health decisions for themselves and their children (Barman, 2018). However, socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors continue to affect girls' education in Nepal. they have to do household work, care for siblings, and help in farming, which limits their chance to get an education. The situation of women has changed over time, from practices like *sati* (burning of a wife with her husband's body) to the modern 21st century. Furthermore, in modern education, girls are still seen as inferior to boys. Their lives are controlled at different stages by parents in childhood, by husbands after marriage, and by sons and daughters-in-law in old age. (Belbase, 2024).

Education is a key indicator of development, and higher education helps as a backbone of national progress. So, Governments of Nepal

Nepal introduced the Higher Education Policy 2076 to enhance access, equity, and quality in education. The aims of policy to develop skilled and innovative human resources and establish Nepal as a knowledge-based society and educational center. To achievement this, the University Grants Commission has (UGC) developed the National Higher Education Framework (2021–2030) to guide future growth in the education sector. (University Grants Commission, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024).

Women in Nepal have historically faced disadvantages in education, health, income, decision-making roles, and access to human rights. These challenges are more severe for women. Therefore, higher education plays a central role in promoting empowerment. Recent trends in female participation at the higher level indicate steady progress, though structural barriers to equality persist (Acharya, 2020).

Education is one of the most powerful indicators to enhance the status of women and empower them. An educated girl is not only able to live with dignity and independence but also contributes to social transformation and global progress. In Nepal, the expansion of female education at the higher level reflects this transformative potential, as more young women are gaining opportunities to follow advanced studies (Acharya, 2023).

The government of Nepal has made education free and compulsory up to the basic level and also free from grades 9 to 12. However, females still do not receive education equal to males. According to the 2078 census,

the female literacy rate is 69.4 percent. The movement for female education in Nepal was first introduced during the Rana regime under Prime Minister Bir Shamsheer. He encouraged parents to educate their daughters (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2024). Females' education is an important component of national development, as it empowers women to participate actively in health, education, employment, and social life. Furthermore, educated women are better able to support their children and all families, as well as reduce social and economic inequalities in education, enhance women's status, and prepare them with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to make meaningful decisions in society (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2025).

Methodology

This study is based on descriptive and analytical methods and depends on secondary sources of data, including the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), the Nepal Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS), and related scholarly articles and reports from the University Grants Commission (UGC) ravelment reports, books, scholarly articles.

Results

Tribhuvan University, established in 2016 BS (1959 AD), is the first and largest university in Nepal, with its central office located in Kirtipur, Kathmandu. Its primary mandate is to produce skilled human resources for the nation's overall development while also preserving and promoting the country's historical and cultural heritage. Tribhuvan University includes five technical institutions, four faculties, and four research centers, including a wide range of academic programs in education, humanities, social science management, sciences, technology, agriculture, medicine, forestry, and medicine, as well as bachelor's, master's, MPhil, and

PhD level programs (University Grants Commission, 2021). Furthermore, Tribhuvan University and several other universities have been established to enhance administration and verification in higher education. Among them, Kathmandu University was established in 2048 BS (1991 AD) and is situated in Dhulikhel of the Kavre district. Similarly, Pokhara University was established in 2054 BS (1997 AD) and is based in Pokhara,

Kaski district. It is a prominent educational and tourist hub. Similarly, Mid-Western University was also established in 2010 AD through a Parliamentary Act (University Grants Commission, 2021). Likewise, Far Western University also established in 2010 AD. Additionally, Rajarshi Janak University was established in 2017 AD (University Grants Commission, 2021).

Table 1. Trends of students Enrolment of Higher Institutions in Nepal Academic year 2019/20 to 2023/24 AD

Universities	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2023/24
Tribhuvan University	356654	347269	454,065	491,299
Nepal Sanskrit University	2828	2828	2306	3,295
Kathmandu University	18643	16046	17945	21,053
Purbanchal University	27527	26896	32298	39,780
Pokhara University	32584	34166	34151	35,200
Lumbini Buddhist University	695	823	1204	1,832
Agriculture and Forestry University	4428	4270	4066	4,066
Midwestern University	9754	10922	10524	11,171
Far Western University	10097	11712	17650	19,356
Nepal Open University	1164	2926	1533	1,634
Rajarshi Janak University	186	417	519	527
B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences	1348	1334	1420	1,459
National Academy of Medical Sciences	642	642	827	459
Patan Academy of Health Sciences	219	234	246	250
Karnali Academy of Health Sciences	59	64	181	181
Pokhara Academy of Health Sciences	-	76	88	88
Gandaki University	-	201	316	474
Manmohan Technical University	-	-	109	109
Madan Bhandari University of Science and Technology	-	-	-	629
Madhesh Agriculture University	-	-	-	141
Yog Maya Ayurveda University	-	-	-	629
Madan Bhandari Academy of Health Sciences	-	-	-	629
Rapti Academy of Health Sciences	-	-	-	-
Lumbini Technical University	-	-	-	35
Total	167107	460826	579448	633053

Sources: University Grand commission 2019/20-2023/24

Table 1 indicates the enrollment of total students in Nepal's 24 different universities from the academic year 2019/20 to 2023/24 AD. Data shows the overall increase of higher education institutions across the country. Among them Tribhuvan University continues to lead with the highest number of students. In the academic year 2019/20, it increased from 356,654 students to 491,299 in 2023/24 AD. Likewise, Purbanchal University, Pokhara University, and Kathmandu University are also showing increasing trend. However, the latest universities, like Lumbini Buddhist University, Far Western University, and Mid-Western University, also demonstrate

steady progress. Furthermore, other new universities, such as Gandaki University, Manmohan Technical University, and Madesh Agriculture University, have started enrolling students in recent years, which is increasing and decentralization of higher education in Nepal.

Overall data express that the total university enrollment of students increased significantly from 460,826 in 2020/21 AD to 633,053 in 2023/24 AD. Which reflects increasing access to and demand for higher education nationwide.

Table 2. *Female Enrollment in Different Universities, Academic Years 2080/81 to 2023/24 AD*

Universities	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2023/24
Tribhuvan University	194934	188180	256460	286850
Nepal Sanskrit University	711	711	483	737
Kathmandu University	8682	7400	8734	9,905
Purbanchal University	14419	13632	16342	20,678
Pokhara University	14267	14794	14791	15,640
Lumbini Buddhist University	217	318	548	732
Agriculture and Forestry University	1900	1819	1828	1828
Mid-Western University	6225	6543	6062	6435
Far Western University	4579	6688	11733	12,826
Nepal Open University	132	445	360	303
Rajarshi Janak University	78	182	222	287
B.P. Koirala Institute of Health Sciences	602	651	691	567
National Academy of Medical Sciences	441	441	624	341
Patan Academy of Health Sciences	159	141	165	187
Karnali Academy of Health Sciences	24	38	96	71
Pokhara Academy of Health Sciences	-	18	20	66
Gandaki University	-	102	155	221
Manmohan Technical University	-	-	33	31
Madan Bhandari University of Science and Technology	-	-	-	1
Madhesh Agriculture University	-	-	-	62
Yogmaya Ayurveda University	-	-	-	0
Madan Bhandari Academy of Health Sciences	-	-	-	363
Rapti Academy of Health Sciences	-	-	-	0
Lumbini Technical University	-	-	-	9
Total	247370	242,103	319,337	358,140

Sources: University Grand commission 2019/20- 2023/24

Table 2 explores the trend at female students' enrollment of different universities in Nepal from the academic year 2019/20 AD to 2023/24 AD. The data reveal a continued increase in overall enrollment of female students, increasing from 247,370 in 2019/20 AD to 358,140 in 2023/24 AD. Tribhuvan University has the highest number of female students, followed by Purbanchal University, Pokhara University, and Kathmandu University. However, newly established universities such as Lumbini Buddhist

University, Mid-Western University, and Far Western University also show a gradual rise in female enrollment.

Some other latest universities, such as Gandaki University, Manmohan Technical University, and Madhesh Agriculture University, have recently been admitting students, reflecting Nepal's expanding higher education system. Overall, the data indicate a significant growth trend in university enrollment across the country over the five-year period.

Table 3. *Female Student Enrollment by level of Programs*

Level	Number of female students			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2023/24
Bachelor	225,588	221,075	513,885	326,864
PGD	125	162	201	84
Master	21,192	20,490	62,189	30,714
MPhil	196	276	1,419	224
PhD	269	100	2,056	254
Total	247,370	242,103	579,448	358,140

Sources: University Grand commission 2019/20-2023/24

Table 3 indicates the number of female students enrolled at different academic levels in Nepal from the academic year of 2019/20 to 2023/24 AD. The data demonstrate that female participation in higher levels of education has increased remarkably over time. The bachelor's level has the largest number of female students, increasing significantly from

225,588 in 2019/20 to 326,864 in 2023/24. Female enrollment at the master level also increased significantly. However, enrollment of female students is smaller in the PGD, MPhil, and PhD levels. Data explored the overall number of female students reflecting an increasing trend from 247,370 in 2019/20 to 358,140 in 2023/24 in Nepal.

Table 4. *Female Student Enrollment in Ecological Belt*

Year	Mountain	Hill	Tarai	Total
2019/20	6,574	143,601	97,195	247,370
2020/21	6,136	138,008	97,959	242,103
2021/22	9,119	173,979	136,239	319,337
2023/24	10,551	189,582	158,007	358,140

Sources: University Grand commission 2019/20-2023/24

Table 4 shows the regional distribution of female enrollment of female students in higher education from the academic year of 2019/20 to 2023/24 AD. The data represent that the hilly region shows the highest number of female enrollments, followed by

the terai region. Whereas, the mountain region has the lowest female enrollments. Overall, three regions have an increasing trend of female enrollments, with the total increasing from 247,370 in 2019/20 to 358,140 in 2023/24 AD. This trend replicates a gradual upgrading in educational access for women across all regions.

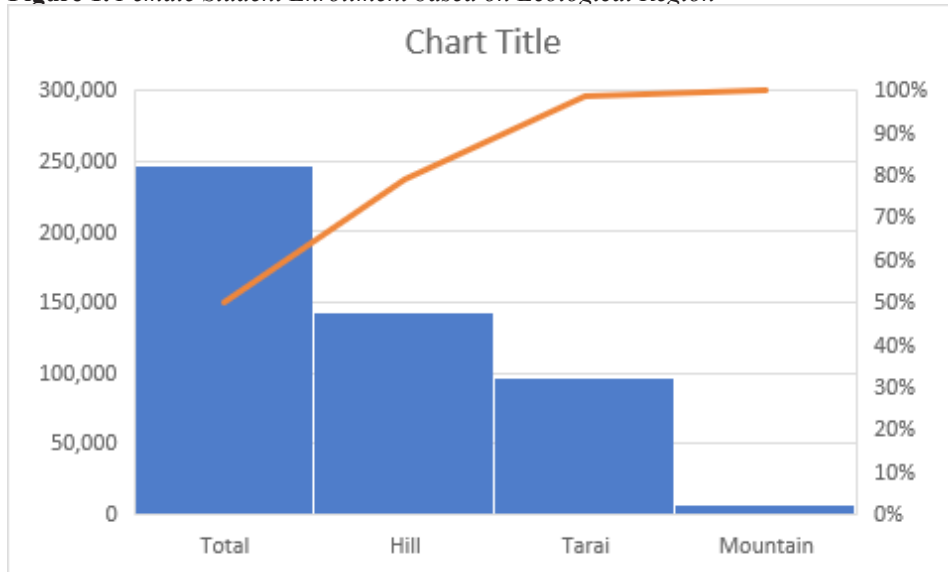
Figure 1. Female Student Enrollment based on Ecological Region

Figure 1 indicates that female students' enrollments in Nepal's higher education are in the Hilly region and Tarai regions compared to the Mountain region.

Table 5. Female Student Enrollment in Higher Education by Provinces

Provinces	Female students			
	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2023/24
Koshi	32,524	33,281	44,215	50,373
Madhes	16640	16,908	25,033	33,616
Bagmati	112928	103,741	135,485	142,901
Gandaki	24552	24,709	29,295	26,570
Lumbini	33971	37,501	47,495	58,329
Karnali	8327	9,855	12,488	14,599
Sudurpaschim	18428	16,108	25,326	31,752
Total	247370	24,2103	319,337	358,140

Sources: University Grand commission 2019/20-2023/24

Table 5 shows the number of female students' enrollments in higher education by province in Nepal from the academic year 2019/20 to 2023/24 AD. The data show that Bagmati Province constantly has the highest number of student enrollments, followed by Lumbini and Koshi Provinces. While Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces have the lowest enrollments. Over the years, all provinces have experienced growth in female enrollment, with the national total an increasing from

247,370 in 2019/20 to 358,140 in 2023/24 AD. So, it reflects increasing trend across the country.

Findings and Discussion

The study found that enrollment of total students in higher education in Nepal is significant progress over the last five decades (University Grants Commission, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). Similarly, women now have greater access to higher education than ever

before, showing progress in gender equality. However, barriers still limit many women's opportunities. In countries such as East Asian nations, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Thailand, parents increasingly view education as a path to social mobility for both male and female (Olson-Strom & Rao, 2020). Higher education greatly improves the quality of life for individuals and supports economic growth. Therefore, countries around the world, including India, are focusing on promoting gender equality in this sector. Similarly, in the context of India, also found in positive progress in higher education in female enrollments due to the increased number of campuses, more female teachers, higher income levels, and better hostel facilities play central role in increasing female enrollments and achieving gender parity in higher education (Ghosh & Kundu, 2021). However, in American higher education is the steady decrease in total student enrollment both male and female over the past decade (Conn, 2020).

In context of Nepal, there has been a continuous increase in female enrollment in higher education. This positive progress is the result of improved family awareness, policy interventions, and expansion of educational institutions across the country. Government scholarship schemes, reservation systems, and campaigns promoting girls' education have encouraged female students to follow advanced studies. However, despite these achievements, inequalities continue between ecological regions and provinces. The data displays Hill and Tarai regions have greater educational access, while the Mountain region continues to show less female participation due to remoteness, socio-economic hardships, and inadequate institutional facilities. Likewise, in the provincial situation, Bagmati Province have better access to urban infrastructure and awareness of family female

enrollment has seen high compared to Karnali and Sudurpaschim provinces. Furthermore, the data also reveal that higher enrollments in bachelor level, but gradually decreases at the MPhil and PhD levels. Female students have to face double burden of study and households' duties, which limits their representation in higher education. The increasing number of new universities in different provinces also indicates educational decentralization.

Conclusion

Study found that female enrollment in higher education is an increasing trend in Nepal, particularly at the bachelor's and master's levels, reflecting a rise. Tribhuvan University continues to govern the higher enrollment of female students. However, new established universities and specialized institutions have smaller enrollment, but it is also an increasing trend. In the case of ecological regions, the Hill and Tarai regions enroll the majority of female students, whereas the Mountain region has lower students. Furthermore, in the case of provinces, Karnali Province has a smaller number of female enrollments in advanced-level programs such as MPhil and PhD. So, overall, findings of this study reflects that female contribution progressive results in higher education, supported by national policies, educational reforms, and social awareness. But, regional and structural inequalities continue to challenge inclusive growth. Creating supportive academic environments and promoting women's leadership in universities are equally essential to ensure gender equity not only in enrollment but also in participation, performance, and representation. Nepal is gradually improving in making education more inclusive, but provincial and regional gaps still exist. For equitable progress in all areas of the country, additional policies, scholarships programme, and supportive learning environments are needed to help more women enrollments in higher education.

References

- Acharya, D. (2021). Status of girls' participation in higher education in Nepal. 6(2). <https://ojed.org/jimphe>
- Acharya, S. (2023). A general review on women empowerment in Nepal. 10. <https://doi.org/10.3126/nutaj.v10i1-2.63045>
- Acharya, U. P. (2020). Status of Women in Nepal: A Critical Analysis of Transformational Trajectories. 17. <https://doi.org/10.3126/njdrs.v17i0.35030>
- Adhikari, S. P., & Adhikar, S. U. (2024). Journey of rural woman empowered through educational struggles to become a university teacher. *A Peer Reviewed SNPRC Journal*, 5. <https://doi.org/10.3126/snpcej.v5i1.83482>
- Adhikari, S. U., & Adhikari, S. P. (2025). Empowering women through education: Trends of literacy rate and its impact on fertility and mortality in Nepal. *CDC Journal*, 33(47). <https://doi.org/10.3126/cdj.v33i47.83415>
- Barman, C. B. (2018). Role of education in empowering women: A case study. 7(1). <https://doi.org/10.51983/arss-2018.7.1.1417>
- Belbase, N. P. (2024). Challenges and opportunities of continuing girl's education in Nepal. 6(1). <https://doi.org/10.3126/ijmss.v6i1.75404>
- Conn, K. (2020). The real deal with declining enrollment in higher education. *The Journal of Law and Education*, 49(4). <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/jled/vol49/iss4/7>
- Dhobi, S. (2025). Assessing barriers to female leadership in higher education of Nepal. 7(1), 37_48. <https://doi.org/10.3126/pg.v7i1.79559>
- Ghosh, S., & Kundu, A. (2021). Women's participation in higher education in india: An analysis across major states. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 1_20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09737030211030048>
- Koirala, P. (2023). Women empowerment in higher education in Nepal. 8(1). <https://doi.org/10.3126/ire.v8i1.56734>
- Olson-Strom, S., & Rao, N. (2020). *Higher education for women in Asia* Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-1628-3>
- Uddin, I., Khan, A. R., & Ghani, F. (2021). Socio-cultural factors affecting female higher education: An analysis of chitral, pakistan. 4(1). <https://dlwqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net/84332744/81-libre.pdf?>
- Uddin, I., & Khan, Z. (2024). The role of higher education in economic growth: Evidence from south asian countries. (3), 556-567. <https://doi.org/10.37075/EA.2024.3.06>
- University Grants Commission. (2021). *Education management information system report on higher education 2019/20 A.D. (2076/77 B.S.)* University Grants Commission.
- University Grants Commission. (2022). *Education management information system report on higher education 2020/21 A.D. (2077/78 B.S.)*. University Grants Commission.
- University Grants Commission. (2023). *Education management information system report on higher education 2021/022 A.D. (2078/079 B.S.)*. University Grants Commission.
- University Grants Commission. (2024). *Education management information system report on higher education 2023/024 A.D. (2080/081 B.S.)*. University Grants Commission.