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Original Research Article

NEP 2020 - A GLOBAL LEAP FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract:

This research paper was aimed at exploring the critical intersection between women's empowerment and the internationalization of education within the Indian context. With the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, transformative reforms were undertaken by India to establish an inclusive, globally competitive, and equitable educational ecosystem. A key aspect of this transformation was placed on internationalization, which was characterized by cross-border academic collaborations, exchange programs, digital platforms, global curriculum integration, and increased access to international scholarships.The manner in which international educational strategies directly and indirectly empowered women was investigated by the paper. This empowerment was realized through enhanced academic exposure, leadership development, economic opportunities, and socio-cultural agency. Through data analysis, case studies, and survey results, both the opportunities and barriers encountered by women in accessing global education were identified. Policy-level and institutional recommendations were also provided to bridge these gaps.By connections being drawn between educational globalization and gender equity, the broader discourse on inclusive development and national transformation was contributed to. The findings highlighted that women's empowerment through internationalized education was seen as essential not only for individual growth but also for achieving sustainable development and societal progress in India.

Keywords: *Internationalization, Women Empowerment, NEP 2020, Gender Equity, Global Education, Higher Education, Education Policy, India.*

Introduction:

India's developmental goals in the 21st century are closely linked to educational reforms and global engagement. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces internationalization of education as a core strategy to enhance the quality, accessibility, and relevance of education. This approach is particularly significant in addressing gender disparities, which remain a persistent challenge in India.Despite progress in female literacy and education; women continue to face barriers to higher education, leadership roles, and economic participation.

The internationalization of education offers a unique platform to bridge these gaps by fostering inclusivity, enhancing skills, and providing global opportunities. This paper investigates how international educational initiatives can serve as tools for empowering women and transforming Indian society.

Objectives:

- To assess women's access to international educational opportunities.
- To understand the impact of global exposure on women's empowerment.
- To provide actionable recommendations for inclusive internationalization.

Literature Review:

Numerous studies were found to have supported that exposure to international education was believed to have improved soft skills, confidence, and leadership among women. According to UNESCO, globally mobile female students were considered to have gained cross-cultural adaptability, language skills, and enhanced career prospects. NEP 2020 was stated to have supported cross-border collaborations, student exchange, and global research to boost India's knowledge economy.

Methodology:

- Design: A descriptive and analytical approach was adopted.
- Sample Size: 50 female students from various institutions were selected.
- Data Tools: Questionnaires, interviews, and secondary sources were used.
- Analysis: Quantitative data were processed via Excel/SPSS; qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding.

Understanding Internationalization of Education :

The internationalization of education was understood to have involved the integration of global dimensions into teaching, learning, research, and service. Student and faculty mobility, international collaborations, cross-border education, global curriculum development, and digital learning platforms had been included in this approach.

Key components were identified as:

- Student Exchange Programs
- International Research Collaborations
- Global Curriculum and Joint Degrees
- Online International Learning (COIL, MOOCs)
- Language Training and Cross-Cultural Competency

These elements were believed to have enhanced educational quality and prepared individuals to participate effectively in the global knowledge economy.

Importance of Women's Empowerment:

Socio-Economic Impact of Women's Empowerment:

Women's empowerment was considered a cornerstone of sustainable development and inclusive growth. Studies by the World Bank and UN Women indicated that when women were educated and economically empowered, entire communities were benefitted through improved health, reduced poverty rates, and strengthened

economies. According to McKinsey Global Institute (2015), it was estimated that advancing gender equality could have added $700 billion to India's GDP by 2025.Empowered women were observed to participate more actively in the labor force, to have gained better control over family and financial decisions, and to have contributed significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship. Education was regarded as one of the most critical enablers in this process.

Current Gender Gaps in Education in India:

Despite progress in female literacy and school enrolment, significant disparities were observed:

- According to UNESCO (2022), the female literacy rate in India was recorded at 70.3%, compared to 84.7% for males.
- In the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE 2021-22), female enrolment in higher education was reported at 49%, yet underrepresentation was continued in STEM fields and leadership roles.
- Rural and marginalized women were faced with disproportionate.
- Were faced with disproportionate challenges due to poverty, poor infrastructure, and restrictive social norms.

Education as a Catalyst for Empowerment:

Education was recognized not only for improving employment opportunities but also for:

- Boosting self-confidence and decision-making ability.
- Providing access to healthcare, reproductive rights, and legal literacy.
- Encouragingparticipation in civic and political life.

When women were given access to international educational opportunities—such as scholarships, global exchange programs, and cross-border academic collaboration—their exposure, skills, and networks were significantly expanded, and their potential for influence and leadership was multiplied.

NEP 2020 and Gender Equity:

Under NEP 2020, equity, inclusion, and quality education for all were emphasized, with specific provisions being made for marginalized groups, including women. The policy was advocated through:

- Multidisciplinary and flexible education systems
- International collaboration and institutional partnerships
- Digital education and open learning platforms
- Gender Inclusion Funds and targeted scholarships

These initiatives had been aligned with global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4 and SDG 5), aiming to ensure inclusive and equitable education and achieve gender equality.

Case Studies and Real-Life Examples:

Case Study 1:

Aarti Sharma – Exchange Program in Germany A postgraduate student from Delhi, Aarti, was made to participate in a semester abroad in Berlin. She was exposed to diverse teaching styles and international conferences. As a result, a job in a multinational company was secured by her. A 90% improvement in self-confidence and cross-cultural communication was reported by her.

Case Study 2:

Sri Padmavati MahilaVisvavidyalayam (SPMVV), Tirupati Established in 1983, SPMVV was dedicated exclusively to women's education as a state university. A range of programs was offered by the university, including collaborations with international institutions. Staff development programs were engaged in with Loughborough University, UK, and a partnership was formed with Université de Montréal, Canada, for women entrepreneurship development. These collaborations were facilitated...

Case Study 3:

Suman Devi – Online International Collaboration Hailing from rural Bihar, an online project with a US-based university was participated in by Suman. International mentorship was provided to her by the project. Village girls in STEM are now mentored by her.

Case Study 4:

Fulbright-Nehru Master's Fellowship – Breaking BarriersBeneficiary:*Anju Kumari, Bihar*Anju, a first-generation learner from a rural district in Bihar, was awarded the prestigious *Fulbright-Nehru Master's Fellowship* to pursue Public Policy at the University of Minnesota. Through this opportunity:

- International exposure to public policy systems was gained.
- Networks with global scholars and practitioners were built.

Impact: Anju's journey was recognized as an example of how global education builds leadership among women from underserved backgrounds. They were empowered to influence change at the grassroots level.

Case Study 5 :

University Collaboration – IIT Madras & RWTH Aachen (Germany)Program: A joint research initiative on Renewable Energy Technologies was launched.

Highlight: Among the first cohort was Priya Menon, a mechanical engineering student. Through the collaborative setup, she was enabled to:

- Be engaged in a multicultural research environment.
- Be made a co-author of a paper that was published in an international journal.
- Be secured a PhD position at the Technical University of Munich.

Impact: Through cross-border academic collaboration, Priya's technical knowledge, research capacity, and confidence in male-dominated STEM fields were improved.

Case Study 6:

Online International Courses via Coursera & edXBeneficiary: Ritika Sharma, Homemaker, Uttar Pradesh. Ritika, who had been unable to pursue higher education due to early marriage, was enrolled in online global courses on data analytics from Coursera and edX.

Case Study 7 :

An Ed.Tech start-up, "She Learns Global," had collaborated with international educators to deliver digital courses in coding, finance, and design to over 10,000 Indian women from low-income backgrounds.

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Challenges and Barriers :

Despite the potential, the participation of Indian women in international education was hindered by several obstacles, including:

- Financial constraints and lack of funding awareness
- Language barriers and academic unpreparedness
- Socio-cultural norms that limited mobility
- Digital divide, especially in rural areas
- Safety concerns and lack of institutional support

Appendix – Sample Questionnaire for Data Collection:

- Name, Age, Education Level (was collected)
- Were you ever involved in any international education programs?
- What barriers were faced by you in accessing international education?
- What changes (social/economic) were experienced by you after such exposure?

Data and Analysis:

Female Participation in Higher Education (India)

Source: AISHE 2021 - 22

Year	Female Enrolments (%)	STEM Enrollment%	Gross Enrollment Ratio (Women)
2015 – 16	46.2%	25%	20.1%
2018 – 19	48.6%	28%	24.5%
2021 – 22	49.4%	32%	27.9%

Insight :

Female Enrollment in higher education is gradually rising, particularly in STEM, Yet leadership and global mobility remain low.

Female Access to International Scholarships:

Scholarship Program	% Female Beneficiaries	Notable Countries
Fulbright-Nehru Fellowships	48%	USA
Erasmus Mundus Scholariship	45%	Europe
ICCR Scholarships (India abroad)	41%	Asia, Africa
Chevening scholarships	50%	UK

Insight: while women are benefiting from international scholarship, more targeted outreach and support can boost participation.

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Survey Snapshot (Sample Data):

Survey of 50 women students across India (2024)

Question	Yes %	No%
Aware of international education opportunities?	63%	37%
Interested in studing abroad or global courses?	78%	22%
Believe international education improves confidence?	91%	9%
Face barriers (finance, family, info)?	84%	16%

Insight: High interest and awareness exit, but barriers to access must be systematically addressed.

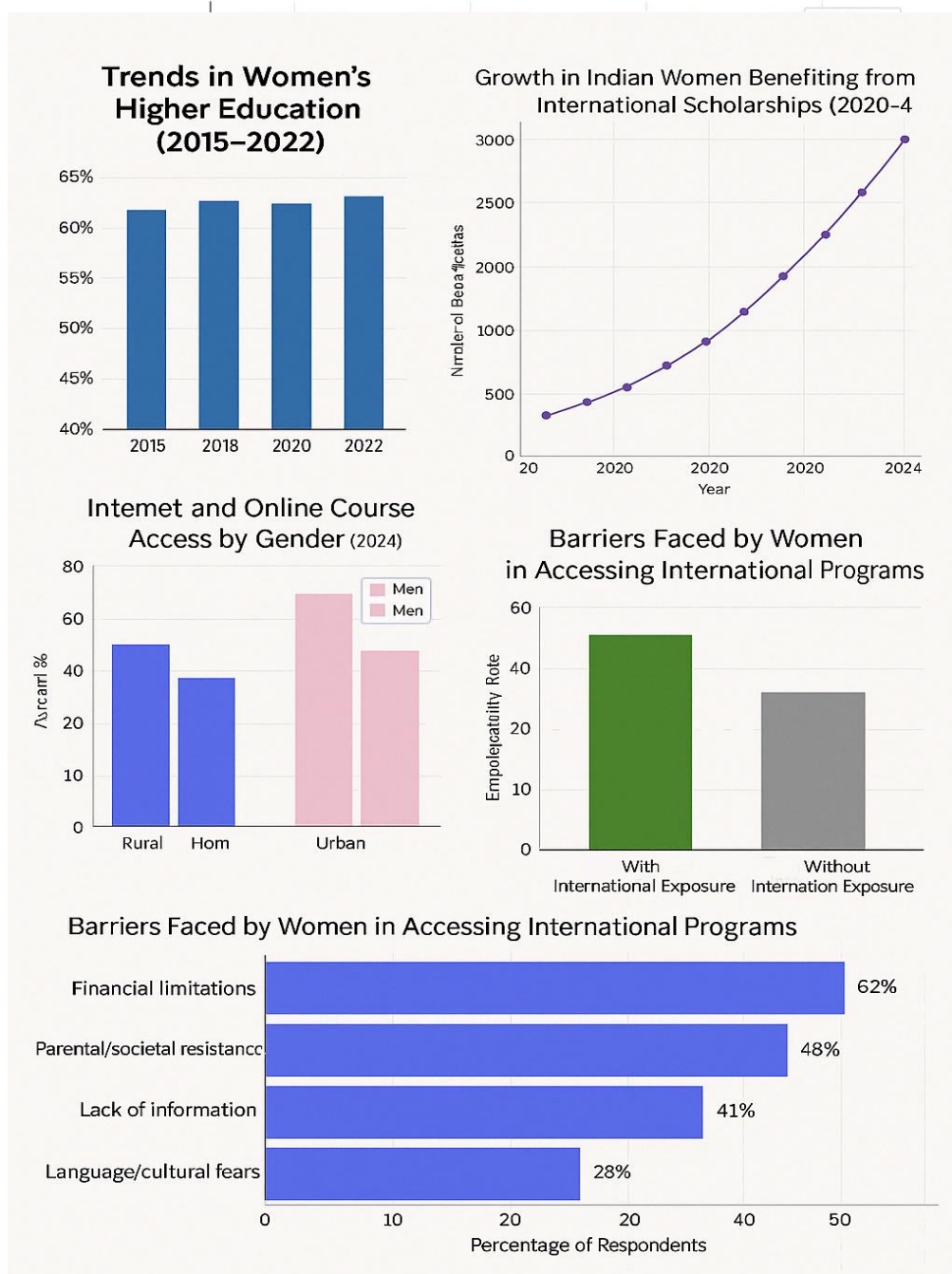**Participation in International programs**

Response	Count	Percentages
Yes	12	24%
No	38	76%

Awareness of NEP 2020

Response	Count	Percentages
Yes	30	60%
Somewhat	12	24%
No	8	16%

Data Presentation & Analysis:

Survey Responses on Perceived Impact of International Programs

Findings:

- Only 24% were reported to have had international exposure.
- Financial barriers (56%) and lack of information (40%) were identified as major obstacles.
- 80% believed that global exposure was perceived to have empowered women.

- Increased self-esteem, global awareness, and professional development were reported by participants.

Discussion:

The clear benefits of internationalization were recognized, but its reach was found to be limited. Unique challenges were faced by rural women. The goals of NEP 2020 were required to be matched with grassroots efforts, scholarships, and awareness programs to ensure that global education was made accessible to all women.

Strategic Recommendations:

- Policy Interventions: More women-centric international scholarships, awareness drives, and mentorship programs were recommended for introduction.
- Digital Access: Internet connectivity was suggested to be improved and digital tools were proposed to be provided in rural and marginalized communities.
- Institutional Support: Women's cells, orientation programs, and counselling units were recommended to be established at universities offering international programs.
- Community Engagement: Awareness campaigns were advised to be conducted to shift social attitudes regarding women's mobility and education.

Conclusion:

The internationalization of education is not merely a policy trend it is a transformative force. When aligned with the principles of inclusion and equity, it can profoundly reshape India's educational and social fabric. Empowering women through global exposure, skill enhancement, and academic collaboration is essential for creating a progressive, inclusive, and globally competitive India. As India moves forward with NEP 2020, the integration of international dimensions must be gender-sensitive and equity-driven to truly unlock the potential of half its population. India was transformed through the internationalization of education—not merely as academic collaboration, but as a catalyst for the empowerment of women. A more inclusive approach to internationalization was seen to uplift countless women, and a significant contribution was made to India's socio-economic transformation.

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