



Gender Issues in the Educational Practices of Higher Education Institutions of Northeast India

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ABSTRACT

In the sphere of education or educational practices in Northeast India, gender issues are particularly noticeable. The entire region of Northeast India is disadvantaged, geographically located in the most remote part India, particularly in terms of socio-economic, educational and communication infrastructure. Because of this, the Indian government and various state governments in Northeast India have set up institutions for rapid improvements in educational standards leading to significant progression in higher education during recent decades. This paper sets out to identify gender issues that exist in educational practices of higher education institutions of Northeast India. The sample area was confined to six higher education institutions in three states of Northeast India. A total of 240 students (i.e., 120 boys and 120 girls) and six public relations officers/representatives of the heads of the six sample institutions took part. Purposive sampling was used for selecting the institutions and participants for the study and two interview schedules were used to collect data from the participants. Quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the data. The results indicated that there are gender issues in the educational practices of Northeast India's higher education institutions and highlight different government and state-wide schemes, policies and provisions working to mitigate and eradicate them. We conclude with some policy implications for achieving gender equity in Northeast India's education system.

KEYWORDS

Gender issues; boys; girls; men; women; educational practices; higher education; Northeast India

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INTRODUCTION

Gender issues arise when undue treatment or discriminated treatment is given either to men or to women because of gender difference. Some of the important concepts are gender discrimination, gender disparities, gender inequalities, etc. Gender is a constitutive element in all social relations. The term 'gender' refers to the social classification of men and women as 'masculine' and 'feminine' (Oakley, 1972) and their expected behaviour based on their assigned social roles (Basin, 2000). In some cases, women are affected by gender issues, whereas in other cases men are affected. Generally, women possess a low social status in comparison to men in patriarchal forms of society, whereas in matriarchal forms women often have a better social status. Most societies of the world are male dominated, and women are more likely to be disadvantaged by gender issues. Although the cognitive difference between male and female does not exist and no research has so far proved it, historical tradition has continuously undermined the woman's role and status in society and even today women scholars still fight against gender discrimination or gender issues.

Gender-based violence, including sexual harassment in the workplace and in educational institutions, is a common phenomenon across the world. In developing countries like Bangladesh, women or girls experience everyday discrimination within their household due to cultural practices: girls have to learn domestic skills and begin to take on domestic duties. In rural areas it is believed that sons should be educated because unlike daughters who, following marriage, serve another family, sons are expected to support their own parents. Similarly, in Malaysia, Malay women face discrimination based on their socio-cultural belief or custom (Sultana and Zulkefli, 2012). In the Indian context, one of the biggest effects of gender discrimination is the son preference, which blocks daughters' access to social assets like education. A patriarchal culture provides better incentives for boys' education as the economic return from it is considered to exceed that of educating a girl. However, households with educated mothers seem to contradict this evidence. Extended exposure of girls to new ideas and social contacts beyond the household could also lead to greater enrolment in both primary and secondary education (Kar and Kar, 2002). The findings of study of Singh and Mukherjee (2018) show biased secondary school completion rates in favour of boys. The findings further suggest that unless we are able to address persisting gender norms, universalizing secondary education with gender equity will remain a distant dream.

In the arena of education or educational practices, gender issues are commonly recognized. Shamai (1994) stated that in Israel, the prevailing gender stereotypes in society reinforce the fact that female students choose predominantly humanities and domestic sciences, whereas male students choose science and technology. Martin et al. (2002) found that women are more sensitive to gender bias than men and they understand gender bias better than men; women, for instance, often recognize and acknowledge sexual harassment, which exists in most organizations, before men do. High levels of disparity across social groups and classes go hand in

hand with new forms of gender discrimination precisely at a time when more and younger women are accessing higher education (John, 2012). Dreze and Kingdon (2001) have found strong evidence of sharp gender bias in school participation in the rural north-Indian states of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

Gender issues also negatively affect social and personal life and impact on economic growth. There is growing evidence to suggest that several aspects of gender relations, i.e., the gender-based division of labour, disparities between males and females in power and resources, and gender biases in rights and entitlements, etc. act to undermine economic growth and reduce the well-being of men, women and children. In addition, women have poorer command over productive resources like education, land, information and financial resources; they exercise limited decision-making powers and have less significant political influence when compared to men (Meenai, 2003).

No country, developed or developing, has been untouched by the demand for gender equality and the pressure for equal representation of women in all spheres of social activity—political, cultural, economic, and educational. Whilst the number of women participating in public life has increased, their participation is often relegated to the areas deemed suitable for women and at lower levels of the occupational ladder. These gender inequalities arise from discriminatory socio-cultural values, norms, and attitudes and educational opportunities (Indiresan, 2002). At the international level, prohibition against sex discrimination was first articulated in the United Nations Charter of 1945 and later reiterated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Since then, virtually all human rights instruments have reinforced and extended protection against this discrimination. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights adopted in 1966 guarantees equal protection of the law to both sexes (Hasan, 2010). University and college administrators should institute mechanisms that provide periodic checks on women faculty's satisfaction, both with their department leaders and their experience as faculty members (Settles et al., 2006). Gender is the most pervasive form of inequality, as it operates across all classes, castes, and communities. Yet, while gender equality has been a key objective of education policy in India for over three decades, it has lacked a critical edge in its implementation (NCERT, 2006). Removal of gender-based issues in educational institutions is one of the key mechanisms for achieving academic reform in educational institutions.

Northeast India is a geographically disadvantaged region located at the extreme point of northern India. This region is connected to East India via a narrow corridor squeezed between Nepal and Bangladesh. The region includes eight states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. The region is characterized by extraordinary ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity, with more than 160 Scheduled Tribes belonging to five different ethnic groups and over 400 distinct tribal and sub-tribal groupings speaking about 175 languages, added to which is a large and diverse non-tribal population concentrated mainly in Assam and Tripura (Bhaumik, 2009). The Northeastern States (NES) have some common characteristics, such as tribal concentrations, hilly areas, high rurality, a predominance of agriculture, industrial backwardness, etc.

(Ahmad, 2013). According to the 2011 Census of India, out of 44,980,293 people in the Northeast Region (NER), around 31,169,272 people live in Assam, which is about 69.29 per cent of the NER population. The rest is distributed across the other seven states (Census of India 2011).

As the region of Northeast India is somewhat educationally backward, the Indian government and different state governments of Northeast India have established a large number of educational institutions for the quick and radical development of education in the region. Along with progress in school education, the region has significantly progressed in higher education during the last few decades.

Establishing Cotton College (the first college in Northeast India) at Guwahati in 1901, and Gauhati University (Northeast India's first university) at Guwahati later in 1948, gave a real boost to the expansion of higher education in the region. In spite of the late start, Northeast India's higher education has rapidly grown since 1947, during the post-independence era. Today, the region has a good network of universities or university-equivalent institutions, besides numerous colleges. Now each state within the region has one National Institute of Technology (NIT) and at least one central university. The region has also other premier higher education institutions, such as the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) at Shillong, the North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology (NERIST) at Itanagar, and the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) at Guwahati. At present, only Assam has around a dozen government funded universities or university-equivalent institutions. Most of the societies in Northeast India are patriarchal, where men dominate and exercise control over most of resources and are considered superior to women (Buongpui, 2013), with a few exceptions like the Khasi and Garo societies of Meghalaya. The customary laws and practices among most of the tribal societies in Northeast India treat women as a 'second sex' (Gough, 1971). As gender issues are commonly observed in different spheres of education in different parts of the world, thus, in the educational practices of higher education institutions of Northeast India, 'how far gender issues are prevailing' is an emerging concern for current research.

Much research has been carried out previously by other researchers in this research area and our research has been informed by them. For example, the study of Dhar (2015) on the topic of gender inequality in education, health and employment in Northeast India found that there is a considerable gender gap in enrolment, which is notably high in the case of higher education, with women's enrolment in higher education being poor compared to men. Thiyam (2011) made a study entitled A Case Study of Working Women in Manipur University which found that 65.6% of women employees face the problem of not having a separate common room from men in their institution; and 50% of the women employees did not get residential accommodation facilities. Goswami (2013) reported that in rural Bengal, 50% women are illiterate, 20% have only an alphabetical knowledge, and the remaining 30% are literate only up to class six. However, in these families most male members are both literate and educated. The findings of the study of Dobelet et al. (2010) in their paper All Things Being Equal: Observing Australian Individual Academic Workloads indicated that in universities where there is underrepresentation of females in senior academic positions, women do not achieve workload equity with their male equivalents, despite producing more research and

coordinating more teaching. Naylor (2007) made a study entitled *Perceived Barriers to Female Advancement in Higher Education* which revealed that there is significant difference between the two genders in their perceptions of barriers to female mobility in the hierarchy of higher education institutions. It was further found from the study that, despite the existence of national studies and legal efforts to combat gender inequity, females were still treated differently and advance less than their male counterparts.

Nwadiuwe's (2007) study entitled *Unwilling Brides: 'Phallic Attack' as a Barrier to Gender Balance in Higher Education in Nigeria* indicated that there exists a relatively high prevalence of sexual harassment in universities and this affects female students adversely. The ripple effect is that women are not provided with a learning atmosphere conducive to enjoying academic freedom and optimizing their potential in educational development, and this contributes to widening the gaps between men and women in Nigeria. Pritchard (2007) showed that gender inequality exists within higher education in the UK and Germany. In the UK only 15.3% of professors in pre- and post-1992 universities were female (2003), while in Germany only 8.6% attained the highest grade of professorship (2003). Another study, entitled, *Gender Differences in Students' Experience in Computing Education in the United States* by Varma and Hahn (2007) revealed that there was significant difference between female and male students with respect to their perceptions of classes, teachers, and advisors. In the study, both female and male students identified a dissatisfaction with teaching assistants. Brink et al. (2006) in their study *Does Excellence Have a Gender? A National Research Study on Recruitment and Selection Procedures for Professional Appointments in the Netherlands* found that there is a gender difference in selection and recruitment procedures, although not across all disciplines, and that there was a disparity in the percentages of male and female applicants who were successful in the selection procedure. Okpara et al. (2005) in their paper *Gender Differences and Job Satisfaction: A Study of University Teachers in the United States* discovered that gender differences were apparent in the job satisfaction levels of university teachers, and that female faculties were more satisfied with their work and co-workers, whereas their male colleagues were more satisfied with their pay, promotions, supervision, and overall job satisfaction.

Edward (2004) found that female doctoral students had a more negative perception of their relationship with their advisor than their male counterparts, and that they were less satisfied with their current advisors and more likely to select a different one. The study entitled *Same-Gender Relationships in Graduate Supervision* by Jens-Christian (2000) found that male faculty members supervise 54 per cent of male students and 46 per cent of female students. Their female colleagues supervise 38 per cent of male students and 62 per cent of female students. Therefore, same-gender tendency is higher among female faculty members than among their male colleagues.

There are also clearly significant differences in same-gender tendencies between fields of learning, as well as between departments with different proportions of female faculty members. Clegg et al. (2000) reported that male tutors had more short interactions with female students. Shelburn and Lewellyn (1995) made a study entitled *Gender Bias in Doctoral Programs in Economics* which revealed that female students received less personal and professional support from their

relationships with faculty than did men. The findings of the study of Kim et al. (2020) demonstrated that younger women (those below 40 years of age) were more vulnerable in regard to the association between workplace gender discrimination and depressive symptoms. From the study of Fidan et al. (2020) it can be seen that the perception of gender discrimination is higher among female students than male. Their study reveals that Underwater Technology students' perception of gender discrimination is higher than Maritime Transport and Management, and Yacht Master students. This study showed that women cannot find jobs in the industrial diving sector due to the restrictions of Turkish labour Laws, although they have education in Underwater Technology programmes.

This brief review of literature on this topic indicates that gender issues are prevalent in different facets of education in India as well as in many other parts of the world.

We identified a gap in knowledge about gender issues in the educational practices of higher education institutions in Northeast India, which have informed the objectives of the research. These are

1. to study the gender issues in educational practices in professional higher education institutions of Northeast India
2. to study the gender issues in educational practices in non-professional higher education institutions in Northeast India
3. to study the existing government policies for protection and reservation (i.e., provision of special facilities) of women in higher education institutions.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS OF RESEARCH

Gender issues: Gender issues refer to the issues or problems that arise because of gender differences among individuals. They are created because of unequal treatment based on gender. Though the historical tradition of gender issues is understood in terms of the dominance/superiority of men over women, for the purposes of this research, gender issues are studied in terms of dominance/superiority of either men over women *or* women over men.

Educational practices: In general, educational practices refer to the activities/means/mechanisms/processes relating to education. In this research, educational practices are understood in terms of seven broad parameters/aspects relating to education: i) teacher behaviour; ii) the curriculum; iii) institutional/departmental activities; iv) discipline; v) enrolment; vi) achievement; and vii) providing benefits to the students.

Higher education institutions: The present study includes university level or university-equivalent level higher education institutions which provide undergraduate and/or post graduate education. Two main categories of higher education institutions, i.e., professional higher education institutions (institutions that mainly offer job-oriented education or technical education) and non-professional higher education institutions (institutions that mainly offer liberal education or non-technical education) are included

Northeast India: Northeast India is represented by eight socio-economically, geographically and educationally disadvantaged states of India: Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Sikkim, and Tripura.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was carried out to study the gender issues in higher education institutions’ educational practices in Northeast India. It takes the form of survey research, where data were collected from a large source of participants (through the survey method) in order to discover the prevalent gender issues in the area of study. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data collection and analysis were used.

LOCATION OF THE RESEARCH

The research was conducted in Northeast India in six higher education institutions (four in Assam, one in Manipur and one in Tripura). The research was confined to these six higher education institutions because they could provide the representational data needed for the research. The scope of the research included both professional and non-professional higher education institutions that provide undergraduate and/or post graduate education. The higher education institutions were managed by both the central government and state governments of Northeast India. Most of Northeast India’s higher education institutions are in Assam, as Assam contributes more than two-thirds of the population to the whole region. Therefore, in this research the majority of the institutions (four) were located in Assam, one was in Manipur and one institution was in Tripura. Brief educational profiles of the sample institutions are given below. Two of the organisations were National Institutes of Technology (see Saxena 2021)

Institution	Programme levels	Subjects
<i>Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, Assam</i>	B.Sc., M.Sc., Doctoral programmes	subjects relating to agriculture and its allied areas.
<i>Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam</i>	M.A., M.Sc., M.Com., M. Tech., MBA, M. Phil., Doctoral programme,	languages, social sciences, sciences, and information technology-related subjects.
<i>National Institute of Technology (NIT), Silchar, Assam</i>	B. Tech., M. Tech., M.Sc., MBA, Doctoral programmes	engineering-related subjects and in a few science and humanities subjects.
<i>Assam University, Silchar, Assam</i>	M.A., M.Sc., M.Com., M. Tech., M.Phil., Doctoral programmes	languages, social sciences, sciences, engineering and technology-related subjects.

<i>Manipur University,</i> Imphal, Manipur	M.A., M.Sc., M.Com., MCA, MBA, M.Phil., Doctoral programmes	languages, social sciences, sciences, and other subject areas.
<i>National Institute of Technology (NIT),</i> Agartala, Tripura	B. Tech., M. Tech., M.Sc., MCA, MBA, Doctoral programmes	engineering-related subjects and some science subjects

Table 1: Distribution of the Sample Institutions and Participants

Sl. No.	Type of Institution	Management of the Institution	Institution name	Department	No. of boys	No. of girls	No. of public relations officers/ representatives of head of institution
1	Professional Higher Education Institutions	Central Government	National Institute of Technology (NIT), Silchar	Computer Science	10	10	1
				Electronics and Communication	10	10	
			National Institute of Technology (NIT), Agartala	Computer Science	10	10	1
				Civil Engineering	10	10	
		State Government	Agricultural University, Jorhat	Agriculture	10	10	1
				Home Science	10	10	
2	Non-professional Higher Education Institutions	Central Government	Assam University, Silchar	Social Work	10	10	1
				Chemistry	10	10	
			Manipur University, Imphal	Economics	10	10	1
				Chemistry	10	10	
		State Government	Gauhati University, Guwahati	History	10	10	1
				Mathematics	10	10	
Total					120	120	6

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

A purposive sampling method was followed for selecting sample institutions and the departments of the sample institutions, as well as participants of the present research. Among the six sample institutions, three are professional institutions and three are non-professional institutions. For both the three professional institutions,

and the three non-professional institutions, two are managed by central government and the other is managed by state government. With the exception of Assam, in most of the states of Northeast India, the majority of the university level or university-equivalent level higher education institutions are managed by central government, and even Assam itself has large numbers of university level or university-equivalent level higher education institutions managed by central government.

The students and public relations officers/representatives of the head of the institution participated in this research. From the six institutions, twelve departments (two from each institution) were taken for selecting students. From the twelve departments, 240 students (20 students from each department, 10 boys and 10 girls) were used as research participants. From the six institutions, six public relations officers/representatives of the head of the institution (1 public relations officer/representative of the head of the institution for each institution) were selected for the research. Details of the distribution of the sample institutions and their respective participants are given in the Table 1.

RESEARCH TOOLS

Details of the two tools used for data collection in this research are given below.

Interview Schedule I was used to collect data from participating students on gender issues in educational practices using the seven components in educational practices outlined above. Operational explanations of each of the seven components are given here:

Teacher behaviour: refers to the support or help or treatment that a teacher provides to students on the basis of their gender. For example, if a teacher praises a male student more than a female student who both have the same level of performance/achievement in a subject, then gender discrimination is reflected in the teacher's behaviour. With reference to different areas of teacher behaviour, gender issues can arise from providing safeguard/protection to students; praising/blaming the students; awarding marks/feedback to students; providing preference to students in sitting in class; providing career guidance and support; providing study/learning materials; encouraging questions in class; judging students who display problems; providing support in clarifying the doubts/difficulties/problems of the students; exploiting/harassing the students; mobilizing parents to educate their children, etc. all come under this category.

Curriculum: refers to the reflection of gender issues or gender discrimination in the learning experiences which are designed and provided for all students. Here, learning experiences comprise all the formal and informal experiences or activities, which include course content; teaching/learning materials and aids; text-books; co-curricular activities, etc. meant for bringing desirable change in students. For example, if the illustrative content of the course contents/textbooks enhance the status of girls over boys, then the contents/textbooks are not gender neutral.

Institutional/departmental activities: refer to the reflection of gender bias in different kinds of activities that are conducted in institutions/departments like teaching/learning activities; evaluation-related activities; managerial activities; liaison-related activities; institutional/departmental development-related activities; promotional activities for students; community-based activities; health care

services and many more. For example, in different activities like functions, festivals, games, sports, drama, competitions, debates and discussions, study tour, etc., if both girls and boys are equally encouraged to participate and take leadership, then there is no gender discrimination in this context.

Discipline: refers to the influence of gender bias in maintaining discipline in the institution. In other words, it refers to establishing whether same kind of discipline is expected from boys as well as girls or whether there is a preferential treatment towards either boys or girls while expecting discipline from them. Gender issues with reference to different areas of discipline, such as maintaining rules and regulations; providing freedom and flexibility; expecting punctuality and sincerity; protecting students; expecting proper manners, style, dress and behaviour, etc. are aspects of this domain of gender issue.

Enrolment: refers to the influence of gender issues or preference during student admission to the institution. Issues here include providing a conducive environment for enrolment; imposing restrictions in admissions; enabling/convincing parents to admit their children as students; providing facilities like hostels, transport and security for students, etc. are addressed in this heading.

Achievement: refers to influence of gender perspectives on learning attainment or performance of students. For example, while providing the scores/grades/marks to the students, whether these are awarded on the basis of student gender? If they are, then gender discrimination will follow in the scores/grades/marks. Providing undue encouragement to students in terms of their results/performance; showing favouritism to students while awarding marks/grades to them; providing hostel facilities/ transport facilities/security for better learning of students, etc. based on gender are also dealt with under this heading.

Providing benefits to students: refers to the influence of gender in providing benefits or facilities to the students. If a student facilitation policy is based on gender, it shows that gender issues are prevalent in the student facilitation policy. Providing scholarship/fellowship; providing rewards/recognitions; supplying study materials; providing special academic assistance for clarifying doubts and difficulties of students, etc. based on gender are all dealt with in this domain.

Each component of the schedule includes a number of items. Each item under a component of the schedule includes three options: 'favouring men (boys)', 'favouring women (girls)' and 'no discrimination in treatment based on gender'. In the research each student was asked to choose (putting a '√' mark) one of the three options. There was no fixed time limit for using this tool. The content/construct validity of the tool was independently verified. This schedule also collected the institutional profile and personal data of the participants.

Interview Schedule II (to study the existing policies of the government for protection and reservation of women in higher education institutions): This schedule is based on the third or last objective of the research. Participants were public relations officers/representatives of the heads of the institutions. The schedule has six items which touch on the different aspects of existing government policies for protection and reservation of women in higher education institutions. The items of the schedule are mostly fact-finding in nature. There is no fixed time limit for this schedule. The content/construct validity of the schedule was

independently verified. The schedule also collected institutional profile and personal data of the participants.

DATA COLLECTION

The data were collected in person by the researchers from participants of the sample institutions in a natural and friendly atmosphere. Interview Schedule I was administered to 120 students (60 boys and 60 girls) of six sample departments (i.e., 20 students for each of the sample departments) of three sample professional higher education institutions, to students studying 4-year B.Tech. degrees/programmes. Data from students of one admission cohort were collected. The same Interview Schedule I was then given to 120 students (60 boys and 60 girls) of six sample departments (20 students from each of the sample departments) of three sample non-professional higher education institutions. The schedule was also given to students of 2-year Masters degrees/programmes in non-professional higher education institutions all of whom were in one admission cohort. For the third or last objective of the study, Interview Schedule II was given to six public relations officers/representatives of the head of the institutions of six sample institutions (one public relations officer/representative of the head for each sample institution).

DATA ANALYSIS

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of data analysis were used. The quantitative method of percentage was used to analyze and interpret the data relating to the first and second objectives of the research. For the third or last research objective, a qualitative method known as descriptive analysis was used. For this, the data collected through interview schedules from the participants were presented thematically through descriptive analysis of the data.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Details of the data analysis for the study are shown in the following sections.

A. Gender Issues in Educational Practices in Professional Higher Education Institutions of Northeast India

Table 2 shows that in professional higher education institutions, 22.5% of all students (boys and girls) responded that gender issues are found (favouring to either men or women); and the remaining 77.5% of students responded that gender issues are not found (no discrimination in treatment based on gender) in teacher behaviour. From these 22.5% students, 10.83% of students responded that gender issues are found in teacher behaviours favouring men and the remaining 11.66% students responded that gender issues are found in teacher behaviours favouring women.

Table 2: Gender Issues in Educational Practices in Professional Higher Education Institutions of Northeast India

Sl. No.	Areas of gender issues	Responses of the different categories of students											
		Boys' responses				Girls' responses				All students' responses			
		Favouring men (or boys)	Favouring women (or girls)	No discrimination in treatment based on gender	Total	Favouring men (or boys)	Favouring women (or girls)	No discrimination in treatment based on gender	Total	Favouring men (or boys)	Favouring women (or girls)	No discrimination in treatment based on gender	Total
1	Teacher behaviours	10%	15%	75%	100%	11.66%	8.33%	80%	100%	10.83%	11.66%	77.5%	100%
		25%		75%	100%	20%		80%	100%	22.5%		77.5%	100%
2	Curriculum	8.33%	11.66%	80%	100%	13.33%	5%	81.66%	100%	10.83%	8.33%	80.83%	100%
		20%		80%	100%	18.33%		81.66%	100%	19.16%		80.83%	100%
3	Institutional /	15%	13.33%	71.66%	100%	10%	5%	85%	100%	12.5%	9.16%	78.33%	100%

	departmental activities	28.33%		71.66%	100%	15%		85%	100%	21.66%		78.33%	100%
4	Discipline	21.66%	13.33%	65%	100%	10%	13.33%	76.66%	100%	15.83%	13.33%	70.83%	100%
		35%		65%	100%	23.33%		76.66%	100%	29.16%		70.83%	100%
5	Enrolment	3.33%	8.33%	88.33%	100%	5%	6.66%	88.33%	100%	4.16%	7.5%	88.33%	100%
		11.66%		88.33%	100%	11.66%		88.33%	100%	11.66%		88.33%	100%
6	Achievement	6.66%	20%	73.33%	100%	3.33%	6.66%	90%	100%	5%	13.33%	81.66%	00%
		26.66%		73.33%	100%	10%		90%	100%	18.33%		81.66%	100%
7	Providing benefits to the students	3.33%	6.66%	90%	100%	8.33%	1.66%	90%	100%	5.83%	4.16%	90%	100%
		10%		90%	100%	10%		90%	100%	10%		90%	100%
	Total	9.76%	12.61%	77.61%	100%	8.80%	6.66%	84.52%	100%	9.28%	9.64%	81.07%	100%
		22.38%		77.61%	100%	15.46%		84.52%	100%	18.92%		81.07%	100%

In the same institutions, 19.16% of students responded that gender issues are found in the curriculum; and the rest (80.83% of students) responded that gender issues are not found in curriculum. Out of the 19.16% of students who reported gender issues in this area, 10.83% of students responded that gender issues are found to favour men and the rest (8.33%) responded that gender issues favoured women.

In terms of institutional/departmental activities, 21.66% students reported gender issues; the rest (78.33%) reported no gender issues in such activities. Out of the 21.66% of students who reported encountering gender issues, 12.5% students responded that these were found to favour men and the rest (9.16% of students) reported gender issues found to favour women.

For the discipline area, 29.16% students reported gender issues; the rest (70.83% of students) responded that gender issues are not found in this area. Out of the 29.16% students who did report encountering gender issues, 15.83% students reported these as favouring men and the rest (13.33% of students) responded that gender issues were biased in favour of women.

In enrolment, 11.66% students responded that gender issues are found; the rest (83.33% of students) did not encounter gender issues in this area. Out of the 11.66% students who did report issues, 4.16% of students responded that gender issues favoured men and the rest (7.5% of students) responded the opposite.

In terms of achievement, 18.33% of students reported gender issues, while the rest 81.66% did not. Out of the 18.33% students, 5% of students responded that gender issues were found to favour men and the rest (13.33% of students) to favour women.

In the area of providing benefits to students, 10% students reported gender issues while 90% did not. Out of this 10% of students, 5.83% responded that gender issues were found to favour men and the rest (4.16% of students) responded that gender issues favoured women.

In terms of educational practices, 18.92% of students reported gender issues; the remaining 81.07% students reported that they hadn't. Out of the 18.92% of students reporting gender issues, 9.28% of students responded that gender issues in this area were in favour of men, and the rest (9.64% of students) responded in favour of women.

To summarize, most students did not perceive that there were any gender issues across all categories. However, where these were noted, the perception was that these were more likely to favour women over men in teacher behaviour, enrolment, achievement and educational practices, while curriculum, institutional/departmental activities and providing benefits to student were perceived to favour men.

Table 3: Gender Issues in Educational Practices in Non-professional Higher Education Institutions of Northeast India

Sl. No.	Areas of gender issues	Responses of the different categories of students											
		Boys' responses				Girls' responses				All student responses			
		Favouring men (or boys)	Favouring women (or girls)	No discrimination in treatment Based on gender	Total	Favouring men (or boys)	Favouring women (or girls)	No discrimination in treatment based on gender	Total	Favouring men (or boys)	Favouring women (or girls)	No discrimination in treatment based on gender	Total
1	Teacher behaviours	10%	11.66%	78.33%	100%	1.66%	8.33%	90%	100%	5.83%	10%	84.16%	100%
		21.66%		78.33%	100%	10%		90%	100%	15.83%		84.16%	100%
2	Curriculum	13.33%	6.66%	80%	100%	3.33%	6.66%	90%	100%	8.33%	6.66%	85%	100%
		20%		80%	100%	10%		90%	100%	15%		85%	100%
3	Institutional/departmental activities	11.66%	10%	78.33%	100%	5%	6.66%	88.33%	100%	8.33%	8.33%	83.33%	100%
		21.66%		78.33%	100%	11.66%		88.33%	100%	16.66%		83.33%	100%
4	Discipline	13.33%	11.66%	75%	100%	5%	10%	85%	100%	9.16%	10.83%	80%	100%
		25%		75%	100%	15%		85%	100%	20%		80%	100%
5	Enrolment	5%	13.33%	81.66%	100%	0%	11.66%	88.33%	100%	2.5%	12.5%	85%	100%
		18.33%		81.66%	100%	11.66%		88.33%	100%	15%		85%	100%
6	Achievement	6.66%	11.66%	81.66%	100%	0%	10%	90%	100%	3.33%	10.83%	85.83%	100%

		18.33%		81.66%	100%	10%		90%	100%	14.16%		85.83%	100%
7	Providing benefits to the students	5%	8.33%	86.66%	100%	0%	8.33%	91.66%	100%	2.5%	8.33%	89.16%	100%
		13.33%		86.66%	100%	8.33%		91.66%	100%	10.83%		89.16%	100%
	Total	9.28%	10.47%	80.23%	100%	2.14%	8.8%	89.04%	100%	5.71%	9.64%	84.64%	100%
		19.76%		80.23%	100%	10.95%		89.04%	100%	15.35%		84.64%	100%

B. Gender Issues in Educational Practices in Non-professional Higher Education Institutions of North-east India

Table 3 explains the gender issues in educational practices in non-professional higher education institutions of Northeast India. The data analysis relating to the table is given below.

In terms of teacher behaviour 15.83% of students responded that gender issues are found in teacher behaviour; and the rest (84.16% of students) did not find any gender issues in this area. From the 15.83% of students who encountered gender issues in this area, 5.83% of these students responded that the issues favoured men and the rest (10% of students) responded that gender issues in this area favoured women.

In terms of the curriculum, 15% of students reported gender issues; the rest (85% of students) did not find gender issues in the curriculum. From the 15% of students who responded in the positive, 8.33% of students responded that these issues are found in the curriculum to favour men and the rest (6.66% of students) responded the opposite (i.e. to favour women).

In institutional/departmental activities, 16.66% of students reported gender issues; and the rest (83.33% of students) responded stating that gender issues were not found in institutional/departmental activities. Out of the 16.66% of students who did encounter gender issues in this area, 8.33% of students responded in favour of men and the rest (8.33% of students) responded in favour of women.

For the discipline area, 20% of students found gender issues, but the rest (80%) responded that they had not encountered gender issues in this area. Out of the 20% of students reporting gender issues, 9.16% of students responded that these favoured men and the remaining 10.83% of students responded that these favoured women.

For enrolment, 15% of students reported encountering gender issues while 85% did not. Of these 15% of students, 2.5% responded that gender issues favoured men and 12.5% that gender issues favoured women.

In terms of achievement, 14.16% students reported encountering gender issues while the remainder (85.83%) did not. Out of these 14.16% of students, 3.33% students' responses were that these favoured men and the remaining 10.83% of students reported these issues as favouring women.

In terms of providing benefits to the students, 10.83% of students who responded reported gender issues whereas the rest (89.16%) did not find any. Out of these 10.83% of students, 2.5% responded that gender issues in this area favoured men and the rest (8.33% of students) found they favoured women.

For the final category, that of educational practices, 15.35% of students surveyed who responded positively identified gender issues whereas the rest (84.64%) did not identify any gender issues. From these 15.35% of students, 5.71% responded that gender issues are found in educational practices which favoured men and 9.64% of students responded that gender issues favoured women in this area.

To summarize, most students did not perceive any gender issues across any of the categories. However, where these were noted, they were more likely to be

perceived as favouring women over men in most categories, with the exception of curriculum where the opposite was true and institutional/departmental activities which showed no gender difference.

The Existing Policies of the Government for Protection and Reservation of Women in Higher Education Institutions

To understand the existing government policies of the government for protection and reservation of women in higher education institutions, data were collected (through the six items based on Interview Schedule II) from six respondents of six sample institutions (i.e., one respondent from each sample institution). Details of the data analysis are given below.

1. What different plans and programmes of the government do you implement in your institution for protection and reservation of women?

Two respondents from professional higher education institutions reported that there is no reservation facility for women, but there is a committee against sexual harassment to protect the women in the institution. Another reported that there is no government plan or programme for protection and reservation of women, however, women are fully protected in the institution, and that there is committee against sexual harassment to protect women in the institution. One respondent from a non-professional higher education institution reported that there is no reservation facility for women, but there are ladies hostels and rest houses for women, and also a gender-sensitization programme as prescribed by the government. The gender-sensitization programme is to ensure that the rights of women are safeguarded and that they are given ample opportunities for development. Another respondent of a non-professional higher education institution reported that there is no reservation facility for women, but there is a Committee Against Sexual Harassment (CASH) to protect women in the institution. The respondent advised that the prevention of sexual harassment and violence against women and embedding gender equality within the university are the main objectives of CASH in the institution. A further respondent of a non-professional higher education institution reported that there are nine University Grant Commission (UGC) schemes for women which are implemented in the institution: (i) basic facilities for women, (ii) construction of a women's hostel, (iii) a day-care centre, (iv) a scheme to develop women's studies in Indian universities and colleges, (v) part-time research associateships for women (now renamed as Post-Doctoral Fellowships for women), (vi) a scheme to build women managers' capacity in higher education, (vii) the introduction of new UG/PG/Diploma courses (in Engineering and Technology) for women, (viii) infrastructure for women students, teachers and non-teaching staff in universities, and (ix) a Post-Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship scheme for single girl children. Developing basic educational facilities and improving educational quality for women in universities are the main focus of these schemes as reported by the respondent.

2. Among the different plans and programmes of government working for maintaining gender equality in the institution, which plans and programmes are highly/more successful and why?

All respondents from professional and non-professional higher education institutions reported that all the plans and programmes of government working to maintain gender equality are successful. One respondent out of the three respondents from non-professional higher education institutions further advised that all the schemes of the University Grants Commission are highly successful in maintaining gender equality.

3. What are the major barriers in the way of achieving gender equality in the institution?

One respondent from a professional higher education institution expressed the view that there is no barrier in the way of achieving gender equality in the institution. Another respondent mentioned that the major barrier is gender discrimination and sexual harassment against women. Another respondent stated that a lack of awareness of education among women is the major barrier to achieving gender equality in the institution. Among the respondents from non-professional higher education institutions, one said that there are no barriers in the way of achieving gender equality in the institution and another reported that sometimes having insufficient numbers of eligible women candidates for different tasks within the institution is a major barrier. Another respondent advised that gender-based violence and a lack of women's decision-making power are the major barriers.

4. Suggest some major steps which can be taken to achieve better gender equality in the institution.

One respondent from a professional higher education institution suggested that women should avail themselves of all the opportunities provided by the government for achieving gender equality. Another suggested that creating awareness about gender equality would be a major step in achieving better gender equality in the institution. Another respondent from a professional higher education institution stated that the admission and recruitment process should be based on merit in order to gain better gender equality in the institution. One respondent from a non-professional higher education institution suggested that the existing discrimination and harassment against women needs to be addressed in order to gain better gender equality in the institution. Another respondent from a non-professional higher education institution reported that, to ensure gender equality, reservation for women regarding admission/recruitment is needed and that financial assistance should be provided to women students. Another respondent from a non-professional higher education institution stated that training on gender sensitization for all employees of the institution would be a major step in achieving better gender equality in the institution.

5. State some of the steps that your institution has taken recently to maintain gender equality in the institution.

One respondent from a professional higher education institution reported that constructing women's hostels and providing the infrastructure for facilities for women students are the main steps taken to maintain gender equality in the institution. Another respondent from a professional higher education institution mentioned that workshops and training programmes in gender equality were conducted as steps for maintaining gender equality in the institution. Another respondent stated that the institution is maintaining an unbiased equality policy in

its new admission/recruitment procedures precisely for the purposes of maintaining gender equality in the institution. One respondent from a non-professional higher education institution stated that seminars and workshops on gender issues help to maintain gender equality in their institution. Another respondent from a non-professional higher education institution stated that equal opportunity is given to both women and men in the admissions and evaluations process to maintain gender equality in the institution. Another respondent from a non-professional higher education institution advised that some of the provisions made for women in their university included a day care centre/women's facility centre and a girls' hostel to maintain gender equality in the institution.

6. Does the government supervise from time to time the practice of gender equality in the institution?

Two respondents from professional higher education institutions stated that the government is sending queries regularly on gender equality. Another respondent from a professional higher education institution reported that the government continuously monitors whether gender equality is properly maintained in the institution. All three respondents from the non-professional higher education institutions reported that circulars/notifications relating to gender equality are received from the government from time to time by the institution in order to monitor whether gender equality is properly maintained in the institution.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

This research has shown that, in professional higher education institutions, based on the responses given by students, the main gender preference is to favour women over men in three components of educational practice: (i) teacher behaviour, (ii) enrolment, and (iii) achievement, but that men were favoured over women in four aspects: (i) the curriculum, (ii) institutional/departmental activities, (iii) discipline, and (iv) providing benefits to the students. Furthermore, the responses of the students indicated that most students did not perceive any gender issues in educational practices but where they did, it was suggested that women are favoured over men. This research also demonstrates that in non-professional higher education institutions a minority of students perceive that women are favoured over men in five of the components of educational practices: (i) teacher behaviour, (ii) discipline, (iii) enrolment, (iv) achievement and (v) providing benefits to the students, while men are favoured over women in the curriculum, and there is equal treatment in institutional/ departmental activities.

Our research found a number of government schemes, policies and provisions for the protection, participation and development of women in higher education institutions. Establishing a committee against sexual harassment, initiating gender sensitization programmes, constructing ladies' hostels and rest houses for women, etc. are just some of the provisions that have been created for women to promote their safe and effective participation in higher education institutions. We also found that continuous efforts are being made to remove the existing barriers in the way of achieving gender equality and equity across the higher education sector.

We therefore conclude that gender issues are present in educational practices in both professional higher education institutions and non-professional higher

education institutions of Northeast India. Although we found evidence of regulated efforts that are being made by governments (both central and state government) for protection and reservation of women, there is clearly still much more work needed to be done before gender discrimination can be completely eradicated.

From the present research, it has been inferred that in Northeast India's higher educational practices gender issues are prevalent to some extent but not to a too high degree. Just as different societies of Northeast India are somewhat open and flexible in comparison to many other Indian cultures, as well as compared to the rest of the world, so gender issues and discrimination are not too acute in the different spheres of life including the sphere of education/higher education in the Northeast Indian society. It has been observed in some cases that women possess better status than men in Northeast India compared to other parts of India on many fronts. Some societies are matrilineal in nature, for example, the Khasis and Garos of Meghalaya. As Northeast India is a melting pot of different religions, cultures, traditions, etc., it also has multicultural and cosmopolitan features and characteristics, and these aspects render the region somewhat open. Therefore, gender issues in Northeast India are prevalent in a lesser scale. Although the region is not totally free from gender issues and discrimination, its gender issues and problems are not too prevalent. Regulated efforts are being seen to be made by governments, the educated masses, and philanthropic organizations to reduce these issues.

POLICY IMPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

From the present research, it is concluded that gender issues are reflected in different aspects of the education system in the higher education institutions of Northeast India. Gender issues are issues not only visible in this area's education system, but also in the education systems of different areas of India and worldwide. In different facets of education such as educational enrolment; the appointment and promotion of teaching staff; and providing educational facilities in terms of study materials, academic support, etc., gender issues can be seen. These issues are reflected in educational institutions in different forms such as sexual harassment, undue preference to same or opposite gender, undue criticism of/harassment of the same or opposite gender, etc.

Although different policies or schemes are launched from time to time to fight gender discrimination and/or to protect and empower the weaker gender group in educational institutions, still gender discrimination and issues remain. Radical efforts are therefore needed by governments, non-governmental organizations, the general public, etc. to root out gender discrimination and issues from the educational system. Teachers, students and other functionaries within the educational system must be made aware of these and educated on healthy gender-based treatment. Coordinated efforts are needed in different corners of society to eradicate gender issues from society's educational system. Bamezai et al. (2020) mentioned that mapping of gender mainstreaming in journalism education holds the promise of ushering in affirmative policies and actions in changing the media discourse pertaining to the exploitation, disempowerment, and marginalization of women. Osuna-Rodríguez et al. (2020) states that gender training is essential in the university environment.

Referring to these contexts, the present research has the following policy implications for achieving gender equity and gender mainstreaming in the education system

1. Identifying different kinds of gender issues such as unduly favouring one gender over the other, gender-based criticism, gender-based violence, etc. in education institutions and eradicating such issues in order to maintain gender parity or gender equity in education institutions.
2. Rendering different aspects of education system (the curriculum, the teaching/learning process, educational evaluation, the student/teacher relationship, the educational environment, etc.) free from gender disparity and discrimination.
3. Removing gender issues from different levels of education such as pre-school level education, primary level education, secondary level education, etc.
4. Providing safeguarding, justice or special treatment to people affected by gender discrimination in the education system.
5. Formulating different plans/policies/schemes for achieving gender equality in the education system and implementing such plans/policies/schemes effectively.
6. Removing gender issues and discrimination in many other spheres of society like household work, place of work, public places, etc.
7. It can be used as a referral point for resolving and ultimately removing problems like religious clashes, issues on caste, language, race, superstitions and blind beliefs, etc. from the education sphere specifically and other spheres generally within society and in people's personal lives.

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