

Education Policies for Women and Children: A Comparative Study of India and Other Countries

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ABSTRACT

Education is a fundamental pillar for the socio-economic development of any nation, playing a crucial role in shaping the future of women and children. As societies evolve, creating equitable educational opportunities for all has become increasingly important. This comparative study explores how different countries, with a particular emphasis on India, address educational challenges and opportunities. It examines various policy frameworks, implementation strategies, and outcomes to assess the effectiveness of these policies and their impact on educational attainment. India's educational policies, including the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) program, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and the Right to Education Act (RTE), aim to improve access and quality of education for women and children. Despite significant efforts, persistent gaps remain, particularly in rural and underserved areas. In contrast, countries such as Sweden, Norway, Canada, and Australia have implemented comprehensive policies that emphasize equal opportunities and inclusivity, resulting in higher educational attainment and better outcomes. This study provides valuable insights into successful models and practices, offering recommendations for enhancing policy effectiveness in India and other nations. The significance of this comparative approach lies in uncovering lessons learned from diverse contexts and applying them to improve educational policies and practices.

Keywords: *Educational Equity, Policy Effectiveness, Comparative Analysis.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental pillar for the socio-economic development of any nation, playing a crucial role in shaping the future of women and children. As societies evolve, the focus on creating equitable educational opportunities for all segments of the population has become increasingly important. This comparative study on education policies for women and children aims to explore how different countries, with a particular emphasis on India, address educational challenges and opportunities. Through examining diverse policy frameworks, implementation strategies, and outcomes, this study seeks to shed light on the effectiveness of these policies and their impact on educational attainment. In India, the quest for educational equity has been a central theme in policy formulation, with numerous initiatives aimed at improving access and quality of education for women and children. Historically, India has faced significant challenges related to gender disparities, socio-economic barriers, and regional inequalities. The Indian government has introduced various schemes such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) program, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and the Right to Education Act (RTE) to address these issues. These policies aim to enhance educational access, improve infrastructure, and provide financial and social support to disadvantaged groups. Despite these efforts, persistent gaps remain, particularly in rural and underserved areas, highlighting the need for ongoing policy refinement and implementation strategies. In contrast, other countries have adopted a range of approaches to address similar challenges. For example, Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Norway have implemented comprehensive education policies that emphasize equal opportunities and inclusive education. These countries offer free and high-quality education, with substantial investments in early childhood education and support for marginalized groups. Their policies often include robust frameworks for gender equality, parental leave, and family support, which contribute to higher educational attainment and better overall outcomes for women and children. Similarly, countries like Canada and Australia have developed targeted programs to support Indigenous communities and economically disadvantaged groups. These programs often include culturally relevant curricula, community engagement, and financial assistance to ensure that all children have the opportunity to succeed academically. The effectiveness of these policies can be attributed to their focus on inclusivity and the provision of tailored support that addresses the unique needs of various communities. This comparative study not only highlights the successes and challenges of different educational policies but also provides valuable insights into best practices and potential areas for improvement. Through analysing the experiences of various countries, the study aims to identify key factors that contribute to successful educational outcomes and offer recommendations for enhancing policy effectiveness in India and beyond. The significance of this comparative approach lies in its ability to uncover lessons learned from diverse contexts and apply them to improve educational policies and practices. As global awareness of educational disparities grows, the need for evidence-based policies that address the specific needs of women and children becomes increasingly urgent. This study contributes to the broader discourse on educational equity by offering a comprehensive analysis of how different nations tackle these critical issues [1-4].

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Grant (2015) argued that the expansion of educational opportunities for women had been promoted as a means to delay the age at which infants were born. He noted that the first cohorts in sub-Saharan Africa who benefited from policies beginning with Malawi's free primary education program in 1994 and later extending to secondary schooling were approaching adulthood and starting to have children. His study aimed to determine whether this educational expansion had led to a later age at first birth and whether the education gradient in fertility timing had remained stable over time. Although female educational attainment had increased over the past two decades, his analysis using instrumental variables revealed that the age at first birth had not shifted. Grant inferred that a decline in school quality and a shift in enrolment age patterns accompanying the expansion may have diminished the transformative potential of education.

Lan and Kuang (2016) maintained that considerable interest had existed among experts in China regarding the influence of women's education on fertility. They observed that few studies had robustly evaluated the interplay between women's education, work experience, and birth control legislation on fertility outcomes. Conducting their research in Guangdong Province, they examined how these factors affected fertility across different reproductive periods and influenced the timing of births. Through analysing census data from 1990, 2000, and 2010 and performing cross-sectional age-specific comparisons, they concluded that under conditions of low fertility, women with higher educational attainment tended to have more children. They also reported that the effects of education and workforce participation on fertility varied by age with education showing a bimodal effect peaking at 25–29 and 40–44 years, and workforce experience peaking at 25–34 years—while noting that the time-squeeze effect of education was relatively modest compared to the stronger influence of workforce participation and the direct impact of birth control policies. They further argued that the trade-off between the length of work experience and educational attainment was significant and that future policy planning in China should account for the modifications introduced in 2015, with a call for more attention to the underlying causal mechanisms involving women's preferences and selection effects.

Parwez (2016) examined the relationship between economic growth and social development through a comparative analysis of Gujarat and Kerala. He observed that, although theoretical and empirical evidence had suggested a positive association between economic growth and social development, in practice, economic development in Gujarat had not been matched by adequate social progress a disparity reflected in its Human Development Index ranking. In contrast, Kerala was found to have performed well on social indicators despite its economic challenges, being ranked in the bottom half of the country in economic terms. Drawing on secondary data from various government and international organizations, Parwez concluded that policymakers should give equal consideration to both economic and social development.

Naseem (2017) conducted a comparative study of the economies of India and China two large Asian nations experiencing rapid growth. He focused on several key indicators, including GDP, GNP per capita, taxation, infrastructure, educational status, and health status, to highlight the challenges and

differences between the two economies. His analysis led him to conclude that China's economic performance was superior to that of India. Furthermore, he argued that for India to catch up with China, it would need to invest in developing a better-educated and healthier labour force across all levels of society.

Jain et al. (2017) explored the status of the female child in India, noting that historically, girls had been regarded as burdens due to cultural practices such as dowry and the expectation of moving into their husbands' homes. They contended that, as a result, female children had traditionally received less medical, emotional, and educational care compared to their male counterparts a disparity that contributed to lower literacy rates among rural women. Although there had been an increase in female literacy since the early 2000s, the authors observed that a significant educational gap persisted between rural men and women. Their study primarily focused on evaluating the current status, identifying the underlying reasons, and offering suggestions for improving the education of rural women.

Sommer et al. (2017) investigated the drive for gender equality in education within resource-limited countries, with a particular focus on how school environments had impeded progress by neglecting the menstrual needs of girls. They reviewed a range of education policy papers from twenty-one nations through both frequency counts and narrative analyses. Their findings indicated that existing national education policies had generally failed to provide adequate water, sanitation, and other necessary facilities related to menstruation. However, they noted that more recent policies on water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) in schools offered promising examples of how education stakeholders might better address the menstrual needs of schoolgirls through targeted policy and program initiatives.

Ermiş-Mert (2018) discussed Turkey's position in the context of European social policy on gender and employment by focusing on the role of families within its legislation. He argued that Turkey had long been categorized alongside Southern European welfare regimes, largely due to policies that emphasized the family—particularly women's roles as primary caregivers as the main provider of welfare. Critiquing policy implementations from the 1980s to the present, especially those concerning the employment of mothers, he noted that despite differences (such as those stemming from predominant religious influences), the reliance on the family had effectively clustered Turkey with other welfare states in Southern Europe. Consequently, he emphasized the need to strengthen the role of men in the private sphere as a means to rebalance caregiving responsibilities in Turkey.

Nakray (2018) examined gender-based exclusion in the Indian education system from feminist and intersectional perspectives, highlighting the constraints that Indian education policies imposed on girls from marginalized communities. He explored how knowledge transfers from developed to developing countries framed in terms of ideational power and the "epistemic imagery" of modernization had influenced these policies. Through focusing on various conditional cash transfer programs initiated by state governments to mitigate gender inequalities, Nakray concluded that such transfers were an inevitable aspect of contemporary epistemic governance, reflecting a persistent power imbalance between wealthy and poorer nations. He further argued that political rhetoric had



fallen short of achieving the dual objectives of economic efficiency and social justice in educational policy.

Singh (2019) reaffirmed that education was the most essential and vital factor for achieving sustainable development and national prosperity. He maintained that school education played an intrinsic role in fostering societal development by promoting a better social structure, enhancing literacy, and enabling individuals to capitalize on available economic opportunities and resources. Singh argued that proper public expenditure and the allocation of additional resources were crucial for realizing universal elementary education. He concluded that the ambitious goals of free, compulsory, universal, and quality school education as outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) could only be achieved through a committed, joint effort by both the central and state governments.

Bose and Heymann (2019) investigated whether policies promoting gender equality in education could lead to improved family planning outcomes. They focused particularly on measures that eliminated tuition fees for primary education and examined how such policies affected women’s reproductive health decision-making. Using a difference-in-difference methodology applied to data from 17 low- and middle-income countries, they found that women exposed to tuition-free primary education were more likely to have their family planning needs met, to shift from traditional to modern contraceptive methods, and to participate in household decision-making regarding health. The study further suggested that enhanced gender equality in decision-making partially mediated these positive effects. Based on their findings, the authors argued that increased investments in education as well as greater intersectoral collaboration by health policymakers were necessary to build on these improvements in reproductive health.

III. Comparative Studied

Country	Policy/Initiative	Focus Group	Key Features	Citation
India	Right to Education Act (2009) Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (2015)	Children; Women/Girls	Guarantees free and compulsory education for children Promotes girl child education and addresses gender bias Includes supplementary schemes (e.g., mid-day meal, scholarship programs)	Ministry of Education, Government of India (2009); Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India (2015)
United States	Title IX of the Education Amendments (1972)	Women; Children	Prohibits gender discrimination in any educational program or activity receiving federal funds	U.S. Department of Education (1972, 2015)



	Every Student Succeeds Act (2015)		Ensures equal opportunities in academics and athletics Holds institutions accountable for student performance	
United Kingdom	Education Act (e.g., Education Act 1996) Equality Act (2010)	Women; Children	Guarantees free and compulsory education Implements special measures for disadvantaged groups Emphasizes gender equality and anti-discrimination practices in educational settings	UK Department for Education (1996); UK Equality Act (2010)
Canada	Provincial Education Acts (e.g., Ontario Education Act, 1986) Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) in Education Policies	Women; Children	Provides an inclusive framework for education at the provincial level Implements anti-discrimination policies Tailors support for diverse learners through GBA+ methodology	Ontario Education Act (1986); Canadian Human Rights Commission; Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (GBA+ guidelines)
Australia	National Education Reform Agreement Gender Equality in Education Initiatives	Women; Children	Focuses on enhancing access and quality of education Implements measures to reduce gender disparities in educational outcomes Promotes continuous improvement in inclusive education	Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment (2009); Australian Gender Equality Strategy

IV. FUNDAMENTAL ROLE OF EDUCATION

Catalyst for Socio-Economic Development: Education serves as a crucial driver of socio-economic progress by equipping individuals with knowledge, skills, and competencies necessary for personal and professional growth. It empowers individuals to break the cycle of poverty, improves job prospects, and contributes to economic stability. Educated individuals are more likely to participate in the workforce, start businesses, and contribute to economic development. Through enhancing

human capital, education fosters innovation, increases productivity, and stimulates economic growth, which ultimately benefits society as a whole.

Promotion of Social Equity and Inclusion: Education plays a pivotal role in promoting social equity and inclusion by providing equal opportunities for all individuals regardless of their background. It helps bridge gaps caused by socio-economic disparities, gender biases, and regional inequalities. Through inclusive educational practices, marginalized groups, including women and children, gain access to opportunities that can transform their lives. Education not only fosters a more equitable society but also contributes to social cohesion by encouraging understanding, tolerance, and respect among diverse groups.

Empowerment and Personal Development: Beyond its economic and social benefits, education is fundamental to personal development and empowerment. It helps individuals realize their full potential, develop critical thinking skills, and make informed decisions. Education fosters self-confidence and self-reliance, enabling individuals to pursue their goals and contribute to their communities. For women and children, education is particularly transformative, as it opens doors to opportunities, enhances their ability to advocate for their rights, and provides the tools needed to overcome barriers and challenges. Through nurturing personal growth and empowerment, education contributes to the overall well-being and resilience of individuals and communities [5].

V. FOCUS OF THE COMPARATIVE STUDY

The focus of this comparative study is to examine and analyse the effectiveness of education policies for women and children across different countries, with a particular emphasis on India. By evaluating various national and international strategies, the study aims to uncover how different policy frameworks and implementation practices address educational challenges and opportunities. The central objective is to assess the impact of these policies on educational attainment and equity. In examining India's educational policies, the study delves into key initiatives such as the Right to Education Act (RTE), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP). These programs are analysed to understand their scope, objectives, and outcomes, as well as to identify the barriers and gaps that hinder their effectiveness. The study explores how these policies address socio-economic disparities, gender inequalities, and regional imbalances in education. The comparative aspect of the study involves analysing educational policies from other countries known for their successful approaches to achieving educational equity. Countries such as Sweden, Norway, Canada, and Australia are included for their innovative strategies and robust support systems. For instance, Scandinavian countries are noted for their comprehensive and inclusive education policies that provide free, high-quality education and extensive family support. Similarly, Canada and Australia's targeted programs for marginalized communities offer valuable insights into culturally relevant curricula and community engagement practices. Through juxtaposing India's policies with those of other nations, the study aims to highlight successful models and practices that can inform policy improvements in India. The analysis seeks to provide actionable recommendations for enhancing educational equity and effectiveness, contributing to the broader discourse on global educational policies [6].

VI. INDIA'S EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

India has made significant strides in enhancing educational opportunities for women and children through a range of policies and programs. Central to these efforts are initiatives such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) program, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), and the Right to Education Act (RTE). Each of these policies aims to address specific challenges related to educational access and quality. The Right to Education Act (RTE), enacted in 2009, is a landmark piece of legislation that guarantees free and compulsory education for children aged 6 to 14 years. It mandates that private schools reserve 25% of their seats for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, aiming to enhance educational inclusivity. RTE also focuses on improving school infrastructure, ensuring that schools meet minimum standards, and promoting a child-friendly learning environment.

Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), launched in 2000, is a flagship program aimed at achieving universal elementary education. SSA emphasizes the need for increased enrolment, retention, and quality of education. It supports various initiatives such as building schools, training teachers, and providing educational materials, particularly in underserved regions. The program also includes provisions for special needs education and bridging the gap for children from marginalized communities. The Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP) scheme, introduced in 2015, addresses the critical issue of gender disparity in education. This program aims to improve the sex ratio at birth, ensure the survival and protection of girl children, and promote their education. It combines awareness campaigns with financial incentives to support families in sending their daughters to school and addressing societal biases against female education. Despite these initiatives, India faces ongoing challenges in educational equity. Socio-economic disparities, regional imbalances, and infrastructural deficiencies continue to impede the full realization of these policies. Addressing these challenges requires sustained efforts and targeted interventions to ensure that all children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, benefit from quality education [7].

VII. CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Socio-Economic Disparities: One of the primary challenges in implementing educational policies effectively is addressing socio-economic disparities. In countries like India, despite the introduction of various initiatives such as the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao program and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, significant gaps remain, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Socio-economic barriers such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, and limited access to quality education resources hinder the equitable distribution of educational opportunities. These disparities are compounded by regional inequalities and varying levels of governmental support, making it difficult to achieve uniform educational outcomes across different populations.

Infrastructure and Resource Limitations: Effective implementation of educational policies often faces obstacles related to inadequate infrastructure and resource constraints. In many regions, especially in developing countries, there is a shortage of schools, qualified teachers, and educational materials. This limitation affects the quality of education and the ability to deliver on policy promises.

Additionally, the lack of proper facilities and resources can impede efforts to provide inclusive and supportive educational environments, exacerbating existing educational inequalities. Overcoming these challenges requires significant investment in educational infrastructure, ongoing support for teachers, and the development of effective resource allocation strategies [8].

VIII. INTERNATIONAL APPROACHES

International approaches to educational policy for women and children showcase a variety of strategies designed to address educational disparities and promote inclusivity. Scandinavian countries, such as Sweden and Norway, offer notable examples of successful policies. These nations provide free, high-quality education from early childhood through higher education, ensuring that educational opportunities are accessible to all children regardless of their socio-economic background. Their policies are characterized by substantial investments in early childhood education, gender equality measures, and comprehensive family support systems, including generous parental leave and childcare provisions. This holistic approach contributes to higher educational attainment and better outcomes for both women and children, reflecting a commitment to reducing educational inequalities. Similarly, countries like Canada and Australia implement targeted programs to support marginalized groups, including Indigenous communities and economically disadvantaged populations. In Canada, initiatives like the First Nations Education Act focus on delivering culturally relevant curricula and improving educational infrastructure in Indigenous communities. Australia's programs, such as the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, aim to close the educational gap by providing tailored support and resources. These programs emphasize community engagement, financial assistance, and culturally appropriate educational practices to address the unique needs of various groups. These international approaches highlight the effectiveness of integrating broad support mechanisms into educational policies. Through combining high-quality education with targeted support for marginalized populations, these countries demonstrate how inclusive and equitable educational systems can be developed. The success of these policies underscores the importance of adapting strategies to local contexts, investing in early education, and ensuring ongoing support for disadvantaged groups to achieve meaningful educational outcomes [9].

IX. INSIGHTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Insights from Comparative Analysis: The comparative study reveals that comprehensive, inclusive education policies are crucial for achieving equitable educational outcomes. Countries like Sweden and Norway demonstrate that substantial investments in early childhood education, gender equality, and family support contribute to higher educational attainment and better overall outcomes for women and children. These countries' success highlights the importance of creating robust policy frameworks that integrate various support mechanisms to address educational disparities effectively. In contrast, India's efforts, while significant, face persistent challenges due to socio-economic and regional inequalities. This underscores the need for targeted interventions to bridge gaps, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Recommendations for Policy Improvement: To enhance educational equity, India and other countries should consider adopting a multi-faceted approach. Policies should focus on improving infrastructure, providing financial and social support, and ensuring inclusivity in educational settings. Lessons from successful models, such as those implemented in Scandinavian countries, can inform the development of more effective strategies. Recommendations include increasing investment in early childhood education, expanding access to quality education through targeted programs for marginalized groups, and fostering community engagement to tailor educational practices to local needs. Additionally, regular evaluation and adaptation of policies based on empirical evidence and best practices from different countries can help address existing gaps and improve educational outcomes for women and children globally [10].

X. CONCLUSION

This comparative study highlights the critical role of education in socio-economic development and the challenges faced by different countries in achieving educational equity. India has made considerable progress through various initiatives such as RTE, SSA, and BBBP. However, socio-economic disparities and infrastructural limitations continue to impede the full realization of these policies. In contrast, countries like Sweden, Norway, Canada, and Australia have demonstrated the effectiveness of comprehensive and inclusive education policies, including substantial investments in early childhood education and support for marginalized groups. The insights from this study underscore the importance of adopting a multi-faceted approach to educational policy. Recommendations include enhancing infrastructure, providing targeted financial and social support, and ensuring inclusivity in educational settings. By learning from successful international models, India and other countries can develop more effective strategies to address educational disparities and improve outcomes for women and children. Regular evaluation and adaptation of policies based on empirical evidence and best practices are essential for achieving meaningful educational progress and fostering equitable opportunities globally.

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