



Challenges And Issues In Women's Education: A Discourse In The Context Of Nagaland

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Abstract: This paper examines the challenges women face in accessing education in rural Nagaland. While significant progress has been made in urban areas, where female students often excel academically, rural regions continue to encounter substantial obstacles. Key issues include inadequate school infrastructure, cultural norms, and economic constraints. In rural Nagaland, many families prioritize domestic responsibilities over education for girls, exacerbating the problem. Economic factors such as the cost of education and the opportunity cost of girls not contributing to family income further hinder educational access. Cultural expectations frequently require girls to focus on household chores rather than their studies, which limits their opportunities for personal and academic development. This paper analyzes the impact of traditional gender roles and economic challenges on women's pursuit of education and explores strategies to address these barriers.

Keywords: Women's Education, Rural Nagaland, Traditional Roles

INTRODUCTION

Education is a cornerstone of development and empowerment, universally recognized as a fundamental right. Across India, significant efforts have been made to ensure equal access to education for both boys and girls. In Nagaland, these initiatives have led to notable progress, particularly in urban areas, where female students not only access education but often excel academically, frequently outnumbering and outperforming their male peers. However, the situation in Nagaland's rural areas presents a more complex and challenging reality. Despite policies designed to promote educational equality, girls in these regions face substantial barriers that limit their access to quality education. These challenges are compounded by traditional gender roles, economic constraints, and societal expectations, which collectively hinder the educational progress and professional advancement of women across the state. In the words of Erui (2019), the burden of women especially in rural areas knows no bounds. Their burden remains *"the heaviest millstone around the neck of female emancipation"*. In this light, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive discourse on the challenges and issues related to women's education in Nagaland, with a particular focus on the rural experiences. It seeks to delve into the issues that affect women's education across Nagaland, examining how traditional roles, economic constraints, and societal norms impact their educational outcomes.

OVERVIEW OF WOMEN EDUCATION IN NAGALAND

Nagaland, a state in northeastern India, has made considerable strides in improving access to education over the past few decades. The state's commitment to education is evident in its literacy rates, which have shown consistent growth. With a literacy rate of 76.11% compared to the National average of 65.46% women in Nagaland have the highest rate of literacy. However, a closer examination of the statistics reveals significant disparities in educational access and attainment across the state, particularly between urban and rural areas, as well as among different socioeconomic groups. The gap in literacy rates between males and females varies significantly by district. For instance, the gender gap in literacy is relatively low in districts like Mokokchung, Zunheboto, and Longleng, indicating more balanced educational access. Conversely, districts such as Phek, Kiphire, and Peren exhibit a much higher disparity, highlighting the uneven progress in achieving gender parity in education across Nagaland (Government of Nagaland, Department of Economics & Statistics, 2019)

In urban areas of Nagaland, the education system has witnessed significant improvements, particularly benefiting women. Schools in towns and cities are generally better equipped, with more qualified teachers and superior infrastructure. This has resulted in greater access to educational resources for female students, leading to higher enrollment rates and better academic performance. In many cases, girls in urban schools outperform their male counterparts in both enrollment numbers and academic achievements. There is also a growing emphasis on higher education for women in urban areas, with an increasing number of girls pursuing college degrees and professional courses. In this context, Tsopoe (n.d) observed that women in Nagaland are excelling academically and are increasingly seeking higher education opportunities compared to men.

In contrast, the situation in rural Nagaland presents significant challenges. The majority of the state's population lives in rural areas, where access to quality education is often limited. Schools in these regions frequently suffer from inadequate infrastructure, a shortage of trained teachers, and scarce educational resources. For girls, these challenges are further exacerbated by cultural and societal norms that prioritize domestic responsibilities over education. Despite policies aimed at promoting gender equality in education, many girls in rural Nagaland are compelled to drop out of school due to family obligations or economic constraints. The dropout rates for girls increase significantly as they transition from primary to secondary education, underscoring the systemic barriers that hinder their continued education.

The data reveals that while some districts in Nagaland, such as Mokokchung, Zunheboto, and Kohima, have achieved near gender parity in higher education, others, particularly Kiphire and Mon, exhibit lower female representation. This indicates that despite progress, there remain significant disparities in educational attainment for women, particularly in certain rural and less developed districts (Government of Nagaland, Department of Economics & Statistics, 2019). In this context, the sections below present a discourse on the challenges that women from rural areas face in accessing quality education

CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING EDUCATION

While many girls in rural Nagaland do receive primary education, a significant number are unable to continue beyond the middle school level. The transition to higher education is often interrupted by societal expectations that prioritize family obligations over personal development. Girls are frequently expected to contribute to household chores and care for younger siblings, which limits the time and energy they can devote to their studies. This not only disrupts their education but also perpetuates a cycle of limited opportunities and economic dependency

One of the most pervasive issues affecting female students is the heavy burden of gendered responsibilities. Even those who manage to continue their education beyond primary school often find themselves balancing their studies with numerous domestic duties. This dual burden significantly hampers their academic progress and contributes to higher dropout rates. Societal expectations that prioritize family needs over personal education create a major obstacle to achieving gender equality in education. In this connection, Erui (2019) observes that while there may be no overt discrimination against women in Naga society, significant gender

gaps persist, especially in activities such as household chores, farming, and decision-making. Recent studies highlight that in Nagaland, domestic chores are predominantly performed by women, with a disparity as high as 93% compared to men. Conversely, men spend much of their time on activities like meetings, discussions, and planning, with a disparity of around 90% in these areas. This imbalance significantly highlights the persistent gender inequalities that impact women's ability to pursue and complete their education.

Cultural norms and traditional gender roles significantly impact women's education in Nagaland. In many communities, there is a prevailing belief that a woman's primary role is within the household, which leads to inadequate support for girls' education. These norms often dictate that girls should prioritize domestic responsibilities over their studies, limiting their opportunities for academic and personal growth. As Tiwary (2015) observes, the issue of girls' education in tribal societies is deeply rooted in cultural values. In these communities, distinct conceptions of gender roles are reinforced, with female children being socialized to fulfill the role of an ideal housewife rather than contributing financially to the family. Consequently, there is a perception that investing in the education of girls is a waste of resources, which further discourages support for their educational pursuits.

As a result, even when girls are enrolled in school, they frequently struggle to fully engage with their education due to the dual burden of academic work and household duties. In the patriarchal structure of Naga society, men have traditionally been given preference, while women have been expected to handle household chores, assist with agricultural activities, and care for younger siblings (Kezienguno, 2019). This deep-rooted cultural expectation further exacerbates the challenges faced by female students, hindering their educational attainment and overall empowerment. In many rural communities, there is a prevailing belief that a girl's primary role is within the household, and education is seen as less important for her than for a boy. These deeply entrenched beliefs continue to influence parental decisions, leading to lower enrollment and higher dropout rates for girls in rural schools.

Another study conducted by Hibo (2012) on the education and empowerment of Angami women reveals that older female children in rural areas often drop out of school to take care of younger siblings, assist with household chores, or help in the fields. The influence of patriarchy and poverty leads families to send male children to private schools for better education, while female children are often enrolled in government schools with minimal expectations. Educated women, however, do not perpetuate gender discrimination and tend to provide equal educational opportunities for their children.

Economic factors also play a crucial role in limiting girls' access to education in rural Nagaland. Many families, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, prioritize boys' education over girls'. The financial burden of school fees, uniforms, and transportation can be prohibitive for these families, resulting in higher dropout rates among girls. Additionally, the opportunity cost of keeping a girl in school—where she could otherwise contribute to the family income through labor—further discourages investment in her education.

While rural areas face significant challenges, it is important to acknowledge that similar issues persist in urban areas, albeit to a lesser extent. Middle-class families in urban Nagaland often place similar expectations on their daughters, requiring them to balance their education with family responsibilities. Although educational opportunities are more readily available in urban areas, the pressure to fulfill traditional gender roles continues to limit the potential of many female students.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The challenges and issues surrounding women's education in rural Nagaland are complex and multifaceted. While urban areas have made significant progress, rural regions lag behind, with cultural norms, economic constraints, and gendered expectations creating substantial barriers to education for girls. Addressing these

challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes community awareness, policy reforms, and targeted support systems. The following recommendations aim to address the barriers identified and promote greater gender parity in education across the state.

Firstly, it is crucial to invest in improving the infrastructure of schools in rural areas. This includes equipping schools with essential educational resources such as libraries, science laboratories, and modern technology. Enhanced facilities will create a more conducive learning environment and support better educational outcomes for all students. Additionally, focus on recruiting and retaining qualified teachers who are committed to working in rural areas. Providing ongoing professional development for teachers will ensure they are up-to-date with effective teaching methods and can better address the needs of their students. Training programs should also address the specific challenges faced in rural education settings, enhancing the overall quality of instruction.

Secondly, establish and expand scholarship programs tailored specifically for female students, particularly those from rural areas. These scholarships should aim to alleviate financial barriers and incentivize girls to pursue and continue their education. In addition to scholarships, develop support programs designed to re-enroll and retain girls who have dropped out of school due to family or economic reasons. These support programs could include flexible learning schedules that accommodate domestic responsibilities and provide financial assistance to families to cover educational costs. Furthermore, promote and develop flexible learning options such as distance education, evening classes, and online resources. These options will allow female students to balance their academic pursuits with their domestic duties. Additionally, create community-based programs that offer support with household chores and care giving responsibilities. By reducing the burden of domestic tasks, these programs will enable girls to dedicate more time and energy to their education.

Thirdly, conduct awareness campaigns aimed at challenging and changing traditional gender roles and cultural norms that prioritize domestic duties over education. These campaigns should engage local leaders, parents, and community members in discussions about the importance and benefits of girls' education. By raising awareness and fostering a supportive community environment, these campaigns can help shift societal attitudes and reduce barriers to female education. Involve local stakeholders, including community leaders, educators, and parents, in the development and implementation of strategies to enhance educational access for girls. Collaborative efforts with these stakeholders will ensure that the initiatives are culturally sensitive and effectively address local needs. Engaging the community in these efforts will also help build a supportive network for female students and reinforce the value of their education.

CONCLUSION

It can be stated that the access to education in Nagaland's rural areas needs to be critically addressed. Despite progress in urban centers, significant barriers still impede the educational advancement of women in these regions. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes improving school infrastructure, expanding financial support, and challenging cultural norms. By focusing on these areas, Nagaland can work towards ensuring that all girls, regardless of their location, have equal opportunities to pursue and complete their education. This effort is crucial for fostering broader societal development and empowering future generations.

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