Enhancing Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in Indian Universities: An Investigation for the Long-Term Strategies

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Abstract

Several discussions and studies happened regarding gender equality and inclusive leadership positions in Indian Universities, despite the lack of long-term effectiveness. Most of the discussions are based on leadership theories and valuable insights that are related to institutional policies. Whereas, in the Indian context an investigating and analysing approaches are required forlong-term effectiveness. As a multicultural country, various factors such as caste, tribe, language, and region have significant roles in women's empowerment and achievements (Kapur, 2018). Caste and tribal features in the Indian culture create boundaries for women in their professional and personal advancement. The marginalised communities were discriminated against from societal advancements and restricted from getting professional growth, especially women in the male-dominated society(Oza, 2012). Moreover, the linguistic and regional diversitiesare also the withdrawing factors for the empowerment.

1. Background and rationale

Several discussions and studies happened regarding gender equality and inclusive leadership positions in Indian Universities, despite the lack of long-term effectiveness. Most of the discussions are based on leadership theories and valuable insights that are related to institutional policies. Whereas, in the Indian context an investigating and analysing approaches are required forlong-term effectiveness. As a multicultural country, various factors such as caste, tribe, language, and region have significant roles in women's empowerment and achievements (Kapur, 2018). Caste and tribal features in the Indian culture create boundaries for women in their professional and personal advancement. The marginalised communities were discriminated against from societal advancements and restricted from getting professional growth, especially women in the male-dominated society(Oza, 2012). Moreover, the linguistic and regional diversitiesare also the withdrawing factors for the empowerment.

India is going in the developing phase, equalisation and inclusion in every workforce sector is essential for the economical and professional progress of the society (Smetana et al., 2018). Therefore, further research is needed to address the obstacles such as caste, tribe, language, and region influence women's professional development and leadership opportunities in Indian universities. Furthermore, this study can include the additional factors such as policy reforms, globalisation features, and regional comparisons to make effective and long- term strategies(Singh & Kumari, 2022). Therefore, this research and analysis are helpful to empower women in the educational sector to perform leadership roles for the advancement of the Indian educational and societal future

2. Purpose and Aim of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify and analyse social and structural barriers that are limiting the gender equality in leadership roles in Indian Universities and propose more effective inclusive strategies for the long-term impact. Aims of the study are:

a. To investigate the influence of caste, tribe, language, and region on women's professional growth in Indian universities.
b. Evaluate the current policies and reforms for implementing gender equality in leadership roles.
c. To identify the impact of globalisation on workforce inclusivity in Indian universities and regional comparisons according to gender equality measures.
d. Generate culturally sensitive long-term strategies for women's development and empowerment in university leadership roles.

3. Research Question

What are the sociocultural, policy-driven obstacles to women's leadership roles in Indian universities, and how can long-term, effective, and inclusive strategies to be implemented to overcome the barriers?

4. Literature Review

The gender inequality in leadership roles in Indian universities needs more discussion, sociocultural, structural, and policy-driven challenges are significant in this investigation. Women's representation in leadership roles is not only empowerment but also generatesinstitutional efficiency and development. This review critically analyses the influence of sociocultural, structural challenges and current policy reforms regarding this issue. Additionally, globalisation impacts and limitations of long-term inclusive strategies on gender equality in Indian universities are discussed here.

4.1. Influence of sociocultural and structural factors in professional development

Most previous studies focused on leadership theories rather than the influencing factors of gender equality. As a multicultural country India, directly intersects with caste, tribe, language, and regional features (Kapur, 2018). Scheduled tribe people face several difficulties in succeeding in their educational pathways as a lack of representation, economic barriers to resources, and linguistic disadvantages (Nagesh & Ramana, 2024). Similarly, women from marginalised communities are facing difficulties in pursuing leadership roles in universities (Paik, 2014). Additional discrimination is faced by women who belong to marginalised backgrounds inprofessional growth. In India, institutional dynamics are dominantly avoidingthe people who have the marginalised background for professional advancement and opportunities (Kijima, 2006). Moreover, traditional societal concepts restrict women from moving forward for their personal or career growth, especially the women who have the tribunal affiliations, limiting them to living in a male-dominated society(Pandey, 2020). Therefore, the social and cultural influences restrict the women from going beyond family obligations and creating employment networks to access the leadership roles.

In contrast, higher literacy rates reframed political norms in some limited places, states or region are successfully promoting women opportunities towards the institutional leading roles.

4.2. Existing policies and reforms

In India, the structural and institutional barriers highlight gender inequality. Most of the institutions have policies that restrict the freedom of women. Lack of maternity leave, limited number of child-care facilities, and lesser flexibility in working hours are significant structural restrictions(Pandey, 2020). The male-dominated society and absence of institutional supportmake difficultfor women to maintain a

balance between their family and professional responsibilities. On the other hand, the university authorities (University Grants Commission) allocated a minimal portion of opportunities for marginalised communities and women in leadership roles(Pandey, 2020). A small number of educational institutions are implemented this policy.It is implemented in an institution only by considering the eligible person rather than the capability to fill this marginalised quota.

4.3. Globalization Impact and regional comparisons

Globalisation has a dual impact on gender equality in Indian universities. Indian universities have upgraded their educational quality and workforce opportunities as per the globalised norms and practices(Chanana, 2007). Therefore, universities focus on globalised ranking, inclusive employment, and academic exchange programmes by giving opportunities to women to maintain their competitiveness globally(Singh & Kumari, 2022). The universities in urban areas, normally adoptthe international policies and framework for implementing gender equality in leadership roles. On the other hand, regionally isolated institutions are not successfully implementing these impacts of globalisation. Therefore, women from marginalised communities and rural areas are facing the issue of inequality in accessing leadership roles and they are often excluded from globalised networks. Moreover, the important effect of globalisation is digitalisation, and the digital divide is also a hurdle for women from the regional area to get digital access and resources(Chanana, 2022). This is also affecting their professional enhancement and network access globally.

4.4. Reginal comparisons and international trend

India is a diverse country;therefore, some regional disparities are also existing there. Educational and political progression is differentiated according to these disparities(Oza, 2012). Some states are showing higher literacy rates and sociocultural progression, these states giving more opportunities to women to access leadership roles(Renn, 2012). In contrast, some states are entrenched with traditional policies and lower literacy, not promoting women's professional development. Moreover, global trends are also differentiated according to their policies and framework(Chanana, 2007). Most Western countries have significant policies for promoting inclusive and equalised employment frameworks and it is also accountable for gender equality norms(Chanana, 2022).

4.5. Long-term strategies

As per the literature, can identify a comprehensive approach by considering India's socio-cultural and structural challenges. The possible strategies are,to implement a policy reform about gender equality as a mandate, conduct leadership and professional development programmes, coordinate women's mentorship workshops and organise a globalised network platform(Renn, 2012). Moreover, universities can enhance women's opportunities by considering cultural and regional diversity to empower them for professional enhancement. These strategies should consider all the influencing factors and globalisation impacts can beused to increase the opportunities for women and shouldensure the institutions are adopting these policies without fail(Singh & Kumari, 2022). These suggestions are helpful to the Indian universities to create an inclusive environment to empower women towards the leading roles.

5. Research Design, Methods, and Methodology
5.1. Sample

A sample represents the population where the study is conducting to collect
information regarding the whole (Boddy, 2016). Sampling is significant in research to identify the characteristics of population. Moreover, this is a process of selecting participants who can provide

insights about the selected area. The objective of this study is to find the obstacles faced by women to the leadership role access in Indian universities, considering the influencing factors such as caste, tribe, language, and region. This study is going with purposive sampling or non-probability sampling. This type of sampling is suitable for studies that do not require any equal chances for the individuals who are selected from the population (Singh & Masuku, 2014). Therefore, in purposive sampling, the researcher intentionally selects the individuals who are important to the study(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, the relevant individuals are women who are holding or aspiring to leadership roles in Indian universities, and who belong to the marginalised background. The researcher can select ten women leaders during the initial stage of the study from across India. As per the reference from the initial group, additional participants are selected through snowball sampling(Palinkas et al., 2015). This is significant for conducting an exploratory study, and it helps to get a broader range of perspectives.

Purposive and snowball sampling is employed to investigate various aspects of the population (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017). This study focuses on understanding the challenges faced by women to access leadership roles, therefore, participant selection is important to achieving the study's objective. Moreover, this study discusses issues such as gender inequality, socio-cultural barriers, and institutional policies by considering the factors influencing women's empowerment in Indian universities.

5.2. Data Collection

This study, a qualitative research approach is suitable to explore the perspectives and experiences of women in leadership roles in Indian universities. This method helps to collect in-depth information regarding the challenges and opinions on institutional policies(Bachiochi & Weiner, 2004). Moreover, in-depth primary data can be collected through semi-structured interviews among selected participants. The main feature of this method is flexibility, it would help the researcher to get clarity about the insights and viewpoints of respondents(Lobe, Morgan, & Hoffman, 2020). Additionally, respondents can share their personal experiences on existing gender equality policy, and socio-cultural influence in shaping women into leadership roles. Qualitative interviews enablethe researcher to investigate the barriers and facilities of women's empowerment, whereas the quantitative method limits the response and broad exploration(Palinkas et al., 2015). Furthermore, it articulates the respondent's opinions in their own words as well as leads to an in-depth discussion on key factors of leadership barriers, inclusion, gender equality, and empowerment.

5.3. Data Analysis

The collected data can be analysed by using a thematic analysis approach. It allows the researcher to identify the respondent's insights and perspectives regarding socio-cultural and structural challenges(De Casterlé, Gastmans, Bryon, & Denier, 2012). This approach is significant in the qualitative methodbecause it elaborately records the fruitfulness and complexity of responses on gender equality and leadership. To maintain easiness as well as privacy and confidentiality, the researcher would use codes for interviewees(Bachiochi & Weiner, 2004). This helps to keep their identity anonymous. In the next phase of analysis, the researcher read the transcript of the interview to identify repeated responses, thoughts, and beliefs expressed by women leaders. This leads to the development of codes which are concise labels that summarise key data related to the significant area of study such as caste, tribe, language, region, and structural policies.

The coded data can be compared with other participants, it helps to identify the differences and similarities between responses. Broader patterns would emerge from these codes, which can be

organised as key themes and sub-themes. This classification is fully based on the responsive pattern of respondents(Palinkas et al., 2015). The structured and flexible nature of thematic analysis enable ones to understand the deep concepts behind participant's experiences(Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The main theme and sub-themes help to identify the perspectives which women leaders navigate, challenge, and experience in gender policies in their professional development.

6. Ethical Issues

In the study on enhancing women empowerment and gender equality in leadership roles in Indian universities, ethical values are significant to ensure the safety, privacy, and dignity of participants(Brey, 2007). Initially, the study focused on keeping the anonymity of personal information. The researcher would not collect personal details such as the name or contact details of participants as part of the privacy policy and to avoid any connection or linkage between the individuals(Brey, 2007). If anyone discloses personal information in the interview transcript, would be deleted from the final data sheet. Moreover, the collected information would be kept as securely as encrypted files with the protection of strong password to avoid any kind of misuse. Finally, the researcher would avoid psychological or physical harm towards participants during interview. As part of this principle, can conduct online interviews to avoid the physical hazards or discomfort of participants(Lobe, Morgan, & Hoffman, 2020). These ethical safeguards ensure that the study is conducted by maintaining the privacy, safety, and rights of respondents.

1. Limitation of study

In this study, several limitations are acknowledged here. The small sample size is the first limitation of this study. A small sample is selected from the vast number of universities and women leaders across India, this small number may not represent the diverse experiences of women across various institutions, regions and departments. This limitation could impact the study's objective to collect genuine points regarding gender equality and women empowerment in leadership roles in Indian universities, especially factors such as caste, tribe, language, and region. Secondly, the interviewer's bias and pre-knowledge regarding the issues, potentially affect the objectivity of analysis. Furthermore, there is a chance to give socially desirable responses from the participants to the questions regarding sensitive issues such as gender discrimination and caste. Finally, this study is conducted in the Indian context. The unique socio-cultural and structural issues may not be generalizable in other countries or regions. Therefore, this limits the generalised applicability of the study result.

2. Expected Outcomes

This research is expected to contribute to a real understanding of gender equality in leadership roles in Indian universities by considering the significant influencing factors such as socio-cultural, and structural challenges of women's professional development. The study would generate possible policy reforms in the diverse background of the country and suggest long-term effective strategies for implementing inclusive employment in university leadership roles.

This study aims to focus on practical possibilities rather than traditional leadership theories, develop inclusive strategies for women to empower them to assume leading roles in the institution,and considering the several influencing factors.

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