Gender on the higher education
learning agenda internationally:
Co-constructing foundations
for equitable futures

INDIA COUNTRY REPORT

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Executive Summary

This Report discusses insights from one institutional case study carried out as part of a larger international project exploring gender equality and awareness in higher education teaching and learning internationally. The research addresses central questions around inclusion of gender in curriculum and pedagogy across disciplines, considering relevant motivations, challenges and opportunities.

Our findings focused around absences, presence and awareness of gender equality in higher education teaching, alongside agendas driving these and outcomes of how gender is included or excluded. Participants identified the importance of gender in achieving wider development goals but lesser participants felt gender was important for HE teaching and learning, especially from the Sciences discipline. Most of the participants also recognised the need to have more experts from different genders as a part of their readings. They perceived that most of the work toward ensuring gender-equality was ensured by the collective efforts of teachers but should be the responsibility of whole university community.

The most prominent challenges identified by the participants included the nature of policies, be it departmental, university or national, teacher expertise, and how curriculum was structured and facilitated. While most of the participants were optimistic about working through these challenges, some of them highlighted the need for a more structural than surface-level approach. They also mentioned the need for an intersectional approach towards addressing gender-related issues especially in the Indian context, since caste and class are significant categories interlocked with gender.

The research generated several recommendations which can be reviewed in full at the end of this report. These focused around the need of having more representative voices from different genders in curriculum readings but also furthered it by highlighting the need for proper pedagogy that ensures these texts are read in appropriate context.

Project Introduction

This Report discusses insights from one institutional case study carried out as part of a larger international project exploring gender equality and awareness in higher education teaching and learning. Gender on the Higher Education Learning Agenda Internationally (GOTHELAI) is funded by the British Academy under the Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) through a targeted programme stream 'Humanities and Social Sciences Tackling Global Challenges.' The research is funded from January 2021-December 2022 and includes research teams at universities in five partner countries: India, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Nigeria and the UK. The GCRF sets out with a remit that includes to *'strengthen capacity for research, innovation and knowledge exchange in the UK and developing countries through partnership'* (GCRF 2021). The key thread unifying our research team is expertise and commitment around gender equality and feminist approaches across disciplinary and international contexts, with the shared agenda of co-constructing more equitable futures. In line with the priorities of the GCRF, we are committed to the importance of equality in gender and education for its own sake, but also for the importance of this to wider processes of equality, democratisation and development for all across wider, interrelated social, economic and political spheres.

The research set out to answer four core questions:

1. Where is gender present and absent in the curriculum focus and approach of the five institutions?
2. How is gender presented as an issue and awareness in curriculum focus and approach across the five institutions?
3. Which individuals, values and agendas are driving the inclusion, rejection and co-opting of gender as a curriculum focus and approach across the five institutions?
4. What are the challenges and opportunities in developing more gender equitable approaches in curriculum?

Background to gender and higher education in the Indian context

Gender equality

According to the World Economic Forum's "Global Gender Gap Report 2021", India stands at 140th for gender equality among 156 countries, slipping 28 positions from 2020. Additionally, nationally there are 940 females for every 1000 males (Census, 2011), because India is primarily a patriarchal society and thus male offspring is preferred over female offspring. Literacy levels are also unequal. The 2011 Census of India reports that the ratio of illiterate women to illiterate men is almost 4:3, while that of literate women to literate men is approximately 3:4. This gap widens as we progress from primary education to the graduate level. While, for primary education for every 100 girls there are 117 boys, this becomes 160 men to 100 women at the graduate level. Numerous factors lead to women dropping out of schools, ranging from lack of basic amenities like separate washrooms, safe and hygienic classrooms to factors like lack of higher secondary schools in close vicinity, early marriage, engagement in household chores, domestic abuse, lack of resources, (GGGR, WEF 2021). To address this gap and encourage single girl-child households the government has schemes for single girl-child called *Sukanya Samriddhi Yojana* (Girl-child Welfare Plan) which is meant

to meet the education and marriage expenses of a girl child. A bank account is opened in the name of the girl child and the government makes an annual contribution. (National Savings Institute, 2013)

However, the situation of graduate and postgraduate education of women in rural India paints an even more disturbing picture where for 100 women there are 234 men, pursuing higher education. (2011 Census of Government of India) Preliminary reports suggest that the ongoing covid-induced pandemic is widening this gap further (UNICEF Press Release, 2021). Nevertheless, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (%) shows an annual increase in the number of female students at the Tertiary Level: from 20.1% in 2011 to 30.2 % in 2019. The percentage of girls making a successful transition from primary to secondary school stands at 91.1% (2018), surpassing boys by 0.5%. (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2021). However, there persists a substantial gap at the higher education level which the government is trying to address by offering multiple welfare schemes.

National higher education context

Colonial History of Higher Education/Post-colonial History of Higher Education- current statistics

India boasts as having a university as early as 5th century CE which was considered the undisputed seat of learning - the Nalanda University (Pinkney, 2015). However, the modern education system traces its roots to the British colonial model. Three provincial universities were established first in Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay laid the foundation for the modern education system in India. They were founded in 1857 after Wood's Education Despatch of 1854 (Schenkman, 1954, p. 24). Currently, there are a total of 981 Universities in India: 426 State, 54 Central, 376 Private, and 125 Deemed to be Universities (UGC, 2020, p. 1); only 16 of these are exclusively for women (AISHE 2018-19); 80 Universities across India receive government funding for Women's Studies Centres (UGC, 2017, p. 4). Among these only 3

percent or 13 out of 431 Universities in India have women Vice-Chancellors (Kumar, 2015). It is also noteworthy that it is only since 2020, that India has its first tribal woman Vice-Chancellor in Dumka, Jharkhand.

Gender and Higher Education

At the time of India's Independence from British rule in 1947, India had a 16% literacy rate, while women's literacy rate was just 8.9%. By the 2011 Census, the literacy rate has gone up to 74% with women's literacy rate at 65.5%. Total enrolment in higher education has been estimated to be 37.4 million with 19.2 million males and 18.2 million females constituting 48.6% of the total enrolment (AISHE 2018-19). Since 1947, the Indian government has brought in several schemes and measures to bridge this gap: The Right to Education Act, 2009, *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (Education for all), UGC's Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child at the Postgraduate level (UGC, 2006), among other scholarships at the higher education level. There have been other initiatives by different states too, like the *Saraswati Bicycle Supply Scheme* by Chhattisgarh Government, (Priya, 2021), Bengal Government's *Sabuj Sathi* (Cycle distribution to students) (Government of West Bengal, 2020), and *Mukhyamantri Kanya Utthan Yojana* (Chief Minister Girl Child Upliftment scheme) by Bihar government which encourages girl students of the state to pursue higher education by providing financial assistance throughout their academic career (Government of Bihar, 2021). There have been other central government schemes like reservation of seats at all the levels, i.e., student, staff and faculty, at universities for people from certain caste and underprivileged economic background to ensure inclusivity at the level of higher education. However, there is a need to enforce these schemes more comprehensively to ensure that more students pursue higher education without having to drop out.

Brief summary of institutional case study

This research took place at a university which was recently recognised as an 'Institute of Eminence' by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. It was established in 2009 and is located in Haryana, North India; it is a Deemed-to-be, non-profit global University awarded with Grade A by NAAC (National Accreditation and Assessment council) and falls under the purview of the Haryana State Government owing to its location. At present, it has a faculty-student ratio of 1:8 with 832 faculty members to 6650. It has nine schools; three research, capacity building and training institutes; and multiple research initiatives and centres. It is a research-intensive university, with more than fifty-five interdisciplinary research centres, and is deeply committed to its core institutional values of interdisciplinarity and innovative pedagogy; pluralism and rigorous scholarship; and globalism and international engagement.

It has 49 percent female students, as compared to 51 percent male students, while there are 54% female faculty members compared to 46 percent male faculty members. A report titled Recent Legal Reforms on Gender Recognition: A Global Review was launched by the Centre for Health Law, Ethics and Technology (CHLET) in July, 2019. The University has been organising conferences, launching reports that address the issue of sexual harassment, gender inclusivity in the university space. The University also has a Gender Studies Group, created in 2015 which helped to organise the first edition of the event; 'Gender Matters?'. The 6-week long event hosted a number of competitions, paper presentations, quizzes etc. to celebrate gender and sexuality. The University also has '*Awaaz*- Women and Law Society', founded in 2009, which specifically focuses on issues of discrimination and bringing out Gender biases.

Methodology

Our approach in this international case study research was one of multi-directional learning (O'Shea 2015) within and between disciplines, institutions and countries; to collaboratively build new understandings and approaches (ILO 2012; CohenMiller and Lewis 2019). The intention of such a cross-national approach is not direct comparison seeking out a most effective approach, but complementary parallel case studies (Hantrais, 2009) as a powerful tool to generate new perspectives on existing challenges through the benefit of what might be learned from each other (Boddy et al. 2013). In line with the principles of our funding through the Global Challenges Research Fund and as feminist researchers, we set out with the aim of collaborative research design from the beginning of the research, as an international, interdisciplinary team. We identified three academic disciplines (one science, one social science, one humanities) that were represented within our national case study university alongside all of the other partner universities. Within each discipline we invited teaching staff (*n*=7) and final year undergraduate students (those anticipated to have the most extensive experience of being taught within their university) (*n*=7) to complete an anonymous online survey that included quantitative and qualitative responses, yielding a total of 42 institutional survey responses. Initial analysis of survey responses informed design of interview questions subsequently targeted to a sample of four teaching staff (three department Heads and one institutional teaching lead) and three student representatives within the university. Interviews were carried out online via zoom, generating audio recording and written transcript which was cleaned up and anonymized for analysis. Analysis themes were agreed between country teams via an iterative process. Data analysis was carried out using Excel for widest international team access. The research received institutional ethical approval. As a next stage our national data will form part of international data analysis, culminating in publication of a subsequent project report.

While we recognise that gender is nuanced in being more than a binary between male and female, for the purposes of this report we have identified the female, male, and other gender

categories that participants selected as part of their survey and interview responses. These identifiers are intended to provide a reference point for readers alongside other key aspects of participant identification.

Findings

1. Where is gender present and absent in the curriculum focus and approach of the Indian, HE institution?

Reflecting on the relevance of gender to three academic disciplines, i.e., Arts and Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences, 90% of participants identified it as highly relevant to Arts and Humanities, 85% identified it as relevant or highly relevant to Social Sciences and only 60% thought it is relevant to Sciences. Both the Science faculty and students during their interviews highlighted that in the University space they are 'scientists before being male or female.'

Almost 50% of participants including students, teachers, and the Institutional Lead, alike, in both interviews and the survey, mention that the inclusion of gender in HE should be discipline and topic-specific. The other half thinks that it should be an integral part of all students' HE experiences. Students across the three disciplines agree that disciplines like Economics, Business Studies, and Finance lack discussion around gender issues. But while the Science student in her interview presented the inclusion of gender as something that is obvious considering the "nature of the discipline", Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences students criticised it. They also condemned the 'exclusionary approach' of having separate courses like 'Gender Studies' since it is mostly women who end up signing for these courses which further cements the notion that only women should be concerned with gender which, as the Social Science faculty pointed out, is a problematic assumption.

Moreover, as far as teaching style and approach to teaching is concerned, 23 out of 37 participants identified gender as adequately represented in their respective field, while 65% of participants thought that there is inadequate gender representation in terms of experts whose ideas are taught. It is not a dearth of experts, but a lack of recognition of their expertise that lies at the core of this 'absence'; and even if there is a dearth of women in

these 'masculinised' disciplines, the question is seen as been on whom lies the onus to take the "historicity of the discipline itself into account" (India Social Science male staff).

Thirty-one out of 42 participants, both male and female, across the three disciplines believed that teachers' pedagogy determines the relevance of gender; this implies that with the right approach and standpoint any topic/discipline can contribute to a gender equitable space and future. Whether gender is present and absent in the curriculum focus and approach does not necessarily correspond to *who* is present/absent among those focus areas and approaches and thus gender can and should be included regardless of the gender of students and teaching staff.

Response to the question 'In what ways, if any, do you see gender as relevant to teaching and learning in your discipline?'
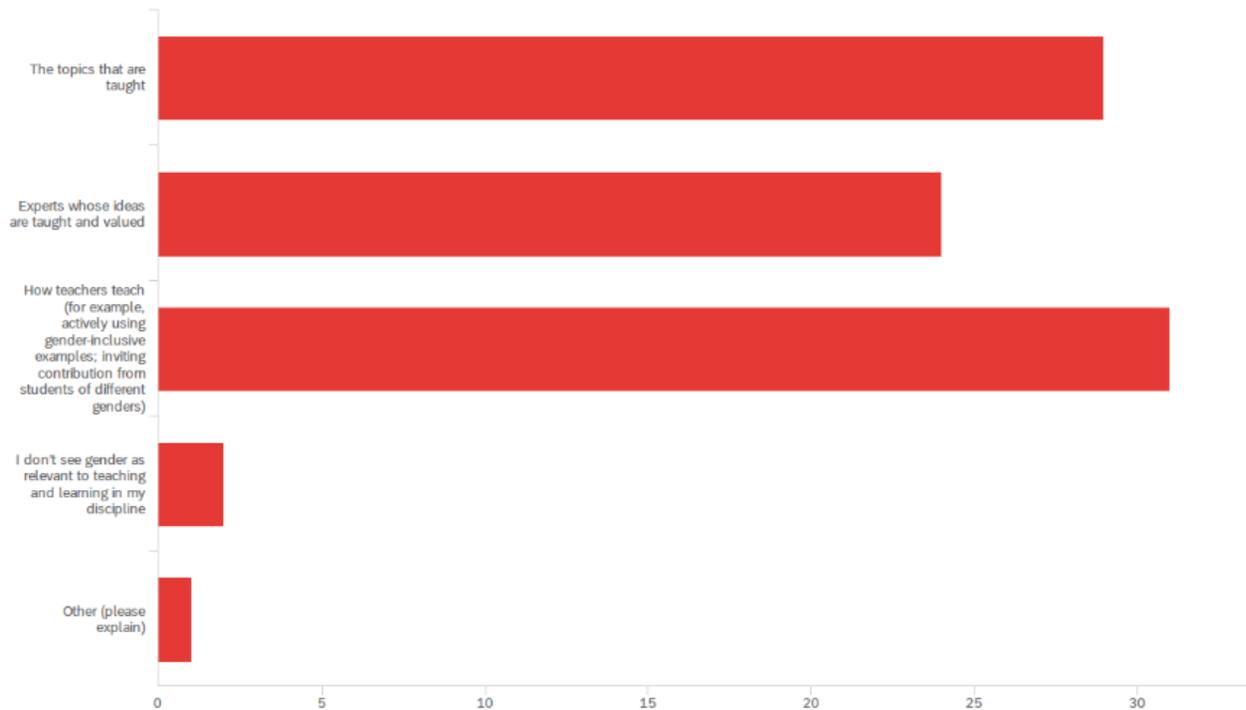
2. How is gender presented as an issue and awareness in curriculum focus and approach in the Indian institution?

While responding to the ways in which they see gender as relevant to teaching and learning in their particular discipline, both male and female participants across all the three disciplines gave most priority to pedagogy, followed by topics that are taught and finally the experts whose ideas are taught. Interestingly, for only 50% of Science and Arts and Humanities participants, the choice of the expert being taught was important, while all Social Sciences participants perceived it as crucial in establishing the relevance of gender in Higher Education. Only two participants, one female and one participant who did not identify with any specific gender, from Arts and Humanities and Sciences respectively, mentioned that gender was irrelevant to their discipline.

Many of our participants observed that in the Indian context, when curriculum refers to gender, it usually means inclusion of more women, either as students, faculty or experts. However, disciplines themselves are marked with gender; for instance, there are more women in history or literature programmes both as students and teachers while pure sciences are dominated by male faculty and students. So, the question arises: how does that affect curriculum design or how it is engaged within the classroom? Participants reported that it manifests itself through text selection with male-dominated theories and texts abounding while women theorists and scientists are too often ignored. A senior faculty with decades of experience in HE institutes across the globe observed that "departments of natural sciences tend to push back against the inclusion of gender in their curriculum" (India Science Male Institution Lead).

Highlighting the need for a more inclusive and integrated gendered curriculum, a social science female student pointed out that Gender Studies as a course or discipline is not making society more aware or sensitive to others because it is not making 'the Other' aware

of the complexities and discrimination faced by some. As pointed out earlier, one reason could be that most gender studies courses and programmes are signed up for by women.

Conditioning and familiarity with set patterns perpetuate ideology from faculty to students. While agreeing to the need for gender to be part of the curriculum and the need for equal representation of both faculty and students from different genders; both the male faculty and female student from the Sciences maintained that there is not enough scope or space to include gender as a framework of analysis. This is interesting because while, on the one hand, they commit in theory to a more egalitarian education institution, in practice they feel unable to create space for it.

There is, however, a way forward and some hope: Social Science and Humanities teachers and students shared ideas of countering gendered boundaries by approaching gender experientially so that it becomes a part of our everyday discourse without being tied to a course or classroom engagement. For instance, the Social Science faculty mentioned how using the space outside the classroom for discussing how whatever was being taught in the classroom enable students to relate the theories to their lives and get a better understanding of their situations using those theories. The India Humanities female student added a word of caution: to be mindful that gender discussions do not remain confined to feminists, all-women cohorts or students, especially when we are opening up possibilities of including other non-binary groups.

3. Which individuals, values and agendas are driving the inclusion, rejection and co-opting of gender as a curriculum focus and approach in the Indian institution?

When the participants were asked, "Who takes responsibility in your university for including gender in HE teaching and learning?", almost 60% of participants agreed that it was the teachers' collectively that takes responsibility to include gender. Interestingly, only a quarter of participants perceived that students' collectively takes responsibility for the inclusion of gender in HE.

Response to the question 'Who takes responsibility in your university for including gender in HE teaching and learning?'
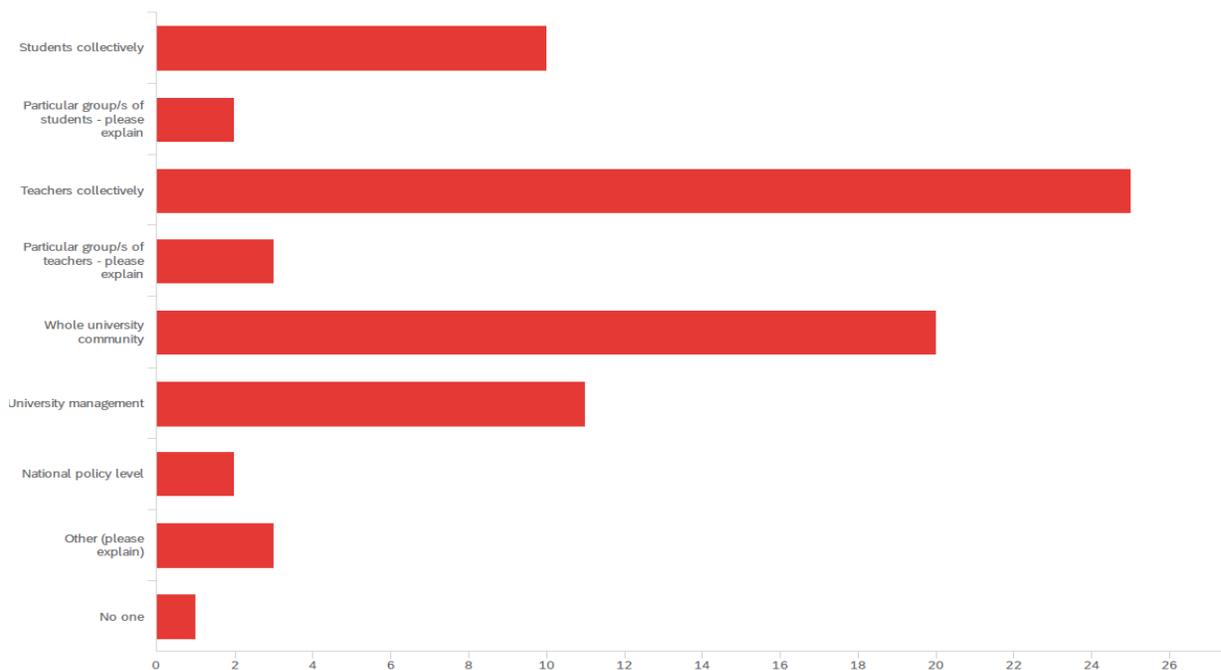
The question of what agendas drives the inclusion, rejection, and co-opting of gender as a curriculum focus and approach received varied and sometimes even contradictory responses from participants across different disciplines. While the India Social Science male staff in his interview mentioned that there were not many gender-related campaigns on the campus, the India Science Male staff said, "I believe in my one year with JGU, I haven't

encountered any issue related to gender and the University is very transparent regarding its gender policies." The former also highlighted the lack of any organised body of teachers for raising awareness about gender issues, though the university has a committee for prevention against gender issues, called 'Gender Sensitisation against Sexual Harassment (COGSASH)' sends informative material through emails and organises talks.

Five out of seven interviewees highlighted how women and gender are considered synonymous and men tend to act as "gender-less" human beings since it seemingly does not affect men. Statements like, "female students tend to go to female faculty", "women faculty are more interested in gender", "only with women getting into academia, the gender issue was brought to forefront", "the issue of gender is usually taken up by female faculty", and "we need to include more women in positions of power", highlight that gender as a category is seen as the responsibility of women. While some participants believed that men should be equally accountable for ensuring gender equality since they were also a part of this spectrum called gender, others tend to (un)knowingly associate gender with women and assign it to them as an area of expertise and responsibility. One of the participants highlighted the limitation of what they called the "patchwork approach" where the onus is on a certain cohort of people, instead we need to focus on the power of the "collective."
The unanimous observation was that instead of challenging prejudices of those already in power, the focus needs to shift to ensuring a more holistic representation that would ensure a more gender-equitable future.

4. What are the challenges and opportunities in developing more gender equitable approaches in curriculum?

More than 90% of participants perceived there to be challenges against representing or incorporating gender equality in HE teaching and learning. Based on the survey data, for 75% of participants, 'policies' and 'teacher expertise' emerged as the most pertinent challenges. Since pedagogy, for 80 percent of the participants, determines the relevance of gender in their teaching-learning experience, it also becomes one of the greatest challenges and can simultaneously present infinite opportunities. Two of the Arts and Humanities female students pointed out that most of the teachers are either unwilling, incompetent, or insensitive as far as gender issues are concerned. Some also argued that the main challenge does not centre around whether gender is represented in higher education or not, but how it is represented, wherever it is represented. According to both students and faculty, one of the greatest challenges is representing gender in HE with all its nuances and without taking a tokenistic approach.

While addressing the challenges related to embedding a gender equitable approach in the curriculum, most of the participants highlighted the need to understand these challenges as a part of the larger system, which comprises "culture, tradition, national context, patriarchal set-up, and Brahmanical orthodoxy" in the Indian context (India Social Science male staff). Most of the participants not only acknowledged the challenges but shared numerous opportunities that can develop more gender-equitable approaches. While some participants called attention to the need for more fluid and inclusive readings and theories, from scholars representing different genders, others add that it should not stop at that and instead should reflect on various other aspects of university space. Some also argued for the need for a much more holistic approach that includes critical analysis of the home, society, nation, national policy, all enmeshed in gender politics. It is only by acknowledging that the issue of gender is all-pervasive, we can find scope for improvement in all these spheres which are mutually interlocking categories.

Most of the participants posed culture as a challenge, identifying that the mindset of people in society is still regressive and gender biased. Some of the participants also used the word 'systemic' to address the larger patriarchal framework of which the university space is just one part and thus cannot be read in isolation from this framework. Another major challenge that is specific to the university space and is reiterated by a number of participants points to the distinction between 'schooling' and 'education.' They believed that universities fail to provide the space and time for proper understanding of such nuanced topics as gender. They instead are seen to focus on training students to follow the curriculum, pass the exam and get their degrees.

In short, education is seen as too often being transactional and market-driven. However, this is not to deny that students themselves often nevertheless understand their responsibility (and its lack thereof) as far as ensuring gender equity is concerned. Two of the survey questions related to who *does* take the responsibility versus who *should* take the responsibility for including gender in HE. (Fig. 1) points to both the challenges and the possibilities. All the participants unanimously agreed that 'the whole university community' should take responsibility though only 60% thought that this happens. Bridging this gap is both a challenge and an opportunity since it also highlights how the participants believed in the idea of collective responsibility to bring meaningful transformation in an area that collectively affects them all.

Who takes responsibility v/s Who should take responsibility for including gender in Higher Education teaching and learning
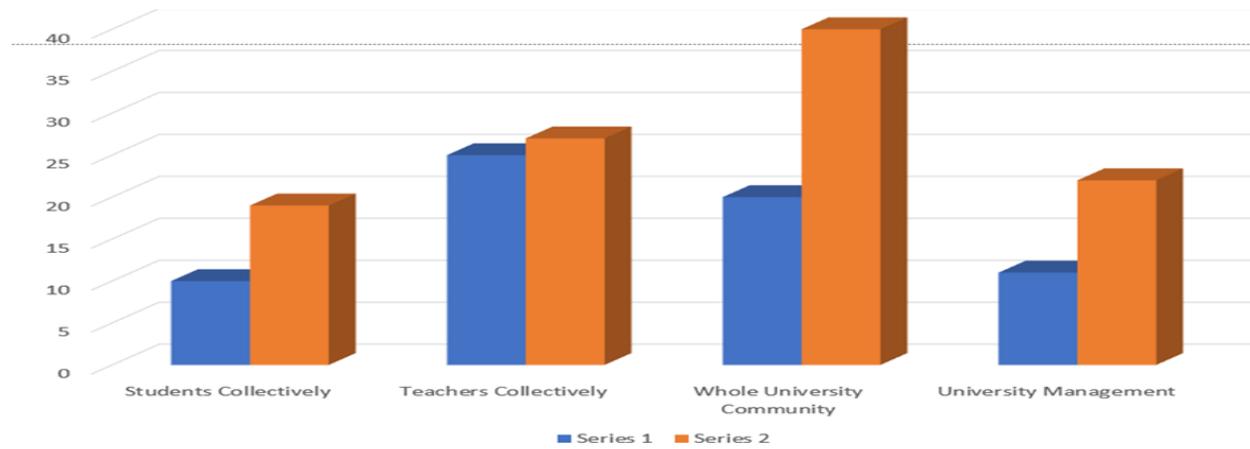
Recommendations

1. Almost 60% of the participants felt that gender should be integral to content and approach throughout HE learning, around one-third of participants also felt it should be taught as a separate area to all.

2. Interviews also highlighted the need for an intersectional approach, especially in the Indian context, where caste becomes a critical category that is constantly interacting with gender (Social Science faculty and student).

3. The role of university and especially the faculty and their methods and approach to teaching was echoed by most of the participants.

4. While participants highlighted the need for having theorists and thinkers from a diverse gender spectrum, participants also mentioned that the way in which those theories are taught in the class was equally if not more important.

5. Increasing recruitment of more female faculty members who in turn provide role models for female students, emerged as key.

6. There is also an identified need for reservation of student places for female students in more colleges and universities to tackle the issue of representation.

7. Some participants also recognised the need for a structural and systemic understanding of the issues related to gender disparity, rather than a surface-level and individualised understanding of it which does not necessarily account for all the nuances attached to this issue.

8. Finally, some of the participants highlighted the need for collaboration and how collaborative projects can help all the genders to be more empathetic towards each other. According to Social Science faculty this will also ensure an exchange of ideas from diverse perspectives and make everyone a part of this project of envisioning a gender equitable future.

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