



Implementing initiatives of women's empowerment in Higher Education of Uzbekistan: challenges and successes

Munajat Sultonova,
Fergana State University
msultonova27gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, Uzbekistan has been working on several reforms and initiatives to support women's participation in leading the changes in the society. There is still some discrimination against women in education, health, entrepreneurship and participating in the process of politics in the country. Numerous stereotypical issues are used to describe women's discrimination, the most common of which are discrimination in education particularly in higher education. Although the image of women in the society is regarded as a mother, a housewife and inactive bystander for participating in changes, the past decades has seen the rapid development of women's progress in Uzbekistan. However, there are still some barriers which women are facing should be reduced to enhance women's role in the society for economic growth of the world. This paper will discuss the implementation of women's development in the society in terms of gender equality in education.

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 1st May 2022

Revised: 1st June 2022

Accepted: 6th July 2022

KEY WORDS: Gender equality, empowerment, education, discrimination, economic growth

Introduction.

Empowering women in the society is very important part of the reforms to reduce the poverty, to keep the sustainable development and the future generations' life. Women play a very necessary role in developing economy and help in making stable societies. One of the important factors for developing the society is considered women's education in Uzbekistan. There have been implementing several new reforms on developing women's education especially in Higher education. In general, since women's education in primary and secondary education in Uzbekistan is compulsory, there are almost equal proportions compared to tertiary education. There are some reasons to show the gap between women and men in higher education, included family background, old stereotypical issues and the attitude towards Uzbek women to make them gain access to education in different field of studies so that they can meet their needs. Taking these issues into consideration, Uzbekistan is creating new study opportunities and inspiring more and more women to enter universities build their career development.

Literature Review

Developing women's role in the society have been learned and suggested to empower women's participation in the process of social, economic, and political developments. It might be argued that why this kind of research is very necessary for countries' future. There should have the answer that the autonomy created for people always make them feel free from inequalities in the society (Wallerstein, 1992). Furthermore, Pathak (2012) pointed out that women's empowerment enables women to decide their decisions confidently by

providing them with the chance of education. According to Elliot (2008), women should be empowered to reduce the poverty which means that they can make money and help their families' income. As for women's political empowerment shows that they are given chances to be part of government decisions as their career (Tiwari, 2010). Women's poor literacy is still crucial issue in marginalized societies which has led to low enrolment in universities.(Adelabu, 2007). Although Adelabu (2007) showed the issues in secondary and higher education in Nigeria, Zharkynbayeva (2020) pointed out the Uzbek government has the lack of enrolment to only higher education due to early marriage particularly in villages.

Methods And Methodology

Research on developing women's actively participation in all fields of studies of higher education in Uzbekistan can be analysed as secondary information from different articles, journals, and publications.

Results And Discussions

After post-Soviet Union, Uzbek women came across challenges in developing their education due to financial weakness and lack of fund for schools in the country. Teachers had to leave their jobs owing to bad conditions and low salaries. The access to compulsory and tertiary education has reduced dramatically owing to an increase regarding the payment services in schools and universities. According to statistics in 2007-2008, the equality was shown between boys and girls at schools, at 51% and 49% respectively (Pradhan and Dutta, 2003). Despite this, due to tuition fees in tertiary education and parents' stereotypical thoughts about sending their daughters to universities in cities also negatively impacted women's participation in tertiary education (Fayzlov and Simirnova, 2008). The World Bank statistics shows that Uzbekistan saw a decrease in term of women's enrolment to universities, 17% and 9% in 1991 and 2011 respectively which is considered as the lowest standard (cited in Zharkynbayeva et al, 2020). They are more encouraged to prepare family house chores, family good manners and relationships which lead to decrease women's status in education (Wendi, 2011). Adelabu (2007) also points out that the lack of funding and capacity to learn women's issues in education and harmful socio-cultural issues are the main barriers for women to get higher education. Higher education for women is not only important for sustainable human development, but also it can lead to human creativity, enterprise and increasing quality of life. According to Krumm (2004) "In the east woman is dashing between contemporary reality and traditions. In this context, the government's task is to create such conditions so that a woman has the right to choose. This is not an assessment of what is good and what is bad. It is a search for how a woman can voluntarily choose her place in society." In this context, the government's task is to create such conditions so that a woman has the right to choose. This is not an assessment of what is good and what is bad. It is a search for how a woman can voluntarily choose her place in society" (cited in Zharkynbayeva et al, 2020). At the same time of creating conditions, education is considered as the most important reform for women so that Uzbekistan will build powerful future generation (Sultonova, 2015).

Most important reasons of this gender gap are profession choice for girls is often made by parents, priority in receiving higher education is given to sons (especially for paid education), based on existing stereotypes girls strive to acquire profession in social sphere that would be useful in family life, unequal geographical distribution of higher educational institutions on the territory of Uzbekistan, unwilling of parents to send girls to study far away from home, earlier marriages compared to men and reproductive burden of women. Moreover, pursuing higher education is significant issue for 18-20 years due to high tuition costs, cost of accommodation, transportation and most frequent marriage age which reduce opportunities to be educated. Consequently, it causes women's unemployment or a stable trend of female domination in nursing (75.2%) and in teaching secondary education (70.7%) which were significantly lower paid (SUM 1,038,161 in 2016) than other jobs including finance, information technology and transport. According to Gupta (2021), only 27% women work in public administration and management.

As gender equality is a vital sector for sustaining development, most international projects included UN Development Program which implements projects in terms of gender equality until 2030. This organization also plays an important role to take several initiatives through developing women's status in Uzbekistan. Although equality can be seen in number of women and men in Uzbekistan, there is a gap between them in

terms of entering universities which shows only 36.5 per cent women students who choose over 50% liberal arts and 60% of them pedagogy to study. Technical education subjects are rarely chosen by women, only 19% in higher education. Moreover, teaching and nursing are also considered as traditional work that more than 70 % women are more inspired or forced to make decisions regarding their future professions in this field of studies (Gupta, 2021).

One of the main worries in Uzbekistan is women's development in education. On the one hand, to reduce the poverty rates, the state has implemented new chances to provide women with inclusion and equality in education and health. On the other hand, it has increased children's literacy rate, physical and mental health in Uzbekistan.

As gender equality initiatives are performed in every country, Uzbekistan also supports women's equal rights and is inspiring girls to study and use employment opportunities for alleviating poverty. Since UN promotes development of women's role in family and society, international organizations included UNDP has been helping create powerful society projects by working collaboratively with the government of Uzbekistan.

One of the important initiatives for girls is to provide the access to tertiary education by restoring part-time programs which is suitable for working students. Implementing such education in 2017, enables women to study and work while they can care their family. Therefore, the statistics showed that the enrollment of the students to part time study involve 67% women and 33% men, in 2018-2019. Besides, Uzbekistan is implementing new reforms and scholarships for women who need financial support to study in higher education. To support more women in higher education, about 50 women are provided with scholarships to get free access to study in their first course. For the next academic years, they are also provided with educational loans. After graduating their university degree, they are guaranteed to support their job access in their communities by authorities. Such financial supports can be provided in terms of women's financial needs and family situation such as who lost their breadwinners.

Conclusion

To reduce the poverty and to support sustainable development, women should be educated as it means to educate a nation (Adelabu, 2007). This study has discussed the matter of women's role and some barriers in Higher education and the solutions, initiatives have been done by Uzbekistan. Although women are highly empowered on paper they come across many barriers in education, policy and business. The laws released by the state on gender equality are challenging to solve the issues as the mentality and old traditional stereotypical thoughts about gender specific roles in people's mind. However, a lot of efforts and initiatives are being made by establishing Family and Women research institute, scholarships for women's active participation in Higher education.

UNESCO statistics shows that women researchers are only 28.8 % compared to men in science in a globe. Nowadays, new Uzbekistan is also increasing women's proportion in tertiary education as a big step through scholarships and financial aids for women who live in difficult conditions. Although the government has been supporting women, there are still difficulties ahead as traditional family stereotypical thoughts regarding early marriage which reduce the gifted girls' motivation to study in higher education. Implementations on girls' education should be started from family and kindergarten so that girls will be motivated to study and will be treated equally in the society. It is obvious that the more women study in higher education means the more family and society can only benefit by reducing poverty and crime, and supports a meaningful society.

References

1. Adelabu, M. A., & Adepoju, T. L. (2007, August). Women and higher education: implication for sustainable development. In A Paper presented at the second Regional Conference on Reform and Revitalization in Higher Education Organised by Higher Education Research and Policy Network (HERDNET) at the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Ibadan (pp. 13-16).

2. Gupta, A., & Gupta, A. (2021). Women Empowerment Initiatives and Socio-Economic Development: In Pursuit of Gender Equality in Uzbekistan. In *Women Empowerment and Well-Being for Inclusive Economic Growth* (pp. 106-119). IGI Global.
3. Ibrahim, S. (2013). Status of Women in Uzbekistan. *IOSR Journal Of Humanities And Social Science*, 10(3), 47-55.
4. Mr. DjamoliddinFazylov and Mrs. Galina Smirnova, The Development of Education, “National Report of Uzbekistan”, 26 September 2008, p.10. [65].
5. Pathak, K. N, &Tomar, J. S. (2012). Skill-Upgradation in five-year plans. *Yojana*.
6. R. A. Ubaydullaeva, R. Krumm (eds.), *Women of independent Uzbekistan: findings of sociological survey*, Center for the Study of Public Opinion "Izhtimoy Fikr", Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Tashkent, 2004, p. 156-157
7. Report of the implementation of the Beijing declaration and platform for action Uzbekistan, Tashkent 2019https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/Beijing_20/Uzbekistan_ENG.pdf
8. Status of women in .Pradhan Sanjay and Dutta Geetanjali, *Status of Women in Independent Uzbekistan*, *Asian Studies*, Vol. XXIV, January, 2006, No,1,p113.
9. Sultonova, M. Y. (2015). Encouraging Women’s Education and Creating Healthy Future Generation in Uzbekistan. *이화여자대학교아시아여성학센터학술대회자료집*, 87-91.
10. Wallerstain, N. (1992). Powerlessness, empowerment and health: Implications for Health promotion programs. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 6(3), 197-205. doi: 10.4278/0890-1171-6.3.197PMID:10146784
11. Wendy Mee, *Country Briefing Paper, Women in the Republic of Uzbekistan*, ADB, February, 2011,p.11-12.
12. Zharkynbayeva, R., Abdiraiymova A., Sarsenbayev, A., & Bekzhanova, N. (2020). Societal perspectives: Gender equality in Central Asia, between desideratum and realities. *Codrul Cosminului*, 26(2), 331-356.