THE KNOWLEDGE | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Student Perception of Gender Equality: A Comparison by Gender Subject and Locality

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify students' perception of gender equality Punjab. The objectives of the study were to assess how students perceive gender equality in different aspects, such as education, employment opportunities, social roles, and rights, to analyze whether there are significant differences in perceptions of gender equality based on the students' gender, to compare the students' perception about gender equality in term of subject and to compare the students' perception about gender equality in term of locality. This study adopted a descriptive research design. Student's selected by using a random sampling technique to ensure representativeness and minimize bias. The sample consisted of students selected from private universities in Lahore, department of education and psychology totaling 100 participants and 100 students from university of the Punjab, department of education and psychology. The research instrument, a self-developed questionnaire for students, was drafted. The researcher herself visited the universities for the collection of data. To assess reliability, Cronbach's Alpha for the self-developed questionnaire calculated, resulting in a highly reliable value of .834. The findings revealed significant gender differences, with female students demonstrating stronger support for gender equality than their male counterparts do. The study also showed that locality influences gender perceptions, with urban students displaying a greater understanding of and support for gender equality compared to rural students, likely due to urban exposure to more progressive ideals and diverse social norms. It is recommended that promoting gender equality in educational settings require multifaceted approaches that address both individual and contextual factors.

Key Words

Gender Equality, Subject, Locality, Higher Education

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Introduction

The way that gender equality seen in public and private institutions is crucial since education is one of the most potent agents for social change. Student attitudes, beliefs, and views on gender equality not only mirror the present quo but also have an impact on future narratives about gender roles and societal standards. (Anthias, 2013).

The perspectives and perceptions of individuals, especially students, play an important role in determining the course of advancement in society in an ever-changing global landscape marked by growing awareness and advocacy for gender equality. The current research, "Student Perception of Gender Equality," analyses students'

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perceptions and concepts of gender equality in the context of education through a comparative viewpoint that considers gender, subject, and location. This first chapter provides the groundwork for an in-depth investigation of this significant topic by explaining the purpose, importance, range, goals, and structure of the thesis. The study Student perception of gender equality a comparison by gender, subject, and locality seeks to investigate how students perceive and understand the concept of gender equality within the educational context. This research is motivated by the pressing need to address gender disparities in education and to gain insights into the factors that influence students' perceptions.

Gender equality is an important objective in the modern world, and education plays an important role in influencing individual's views and ideas (Anderson, 2010). This study aims to deliver knowledge on whether behaviors of gender equality among male and female students differ substantially, how topic decisions can impact these beliefs, and whether opinions are affected by the location of educational institutions.

Research indicates that female students often perceive gender inequalities more readily than their male counterparts (Ayalon, 2003). This difference may be due to various factors, including socialization and cultural expectations (Frawley & Smith, 2018). Classroom interactions also differ based on gender, with studies showing that male students often dominate classroom discussions, influencing perceptions of gender fairness (Francis & Skelton, 2005).

Studies consistently show that male and female students perceive gender equality differently, reflecting broader societal trends (Smith et al., 2018). For instance, Smith and colleagues found that male students often view gender equality as a settled issue, whereas female students highlight areas where inequalities still persist, such as in classroom interactions and career opportunities. Female students' heightened awareness of inequality is often attributed to personal experiences with discrimination, especially in male-dominated fields (Kane & Mertz, 2021).

A growing body of research explores how students' perceptions of gender equality differ across academic disciplines. For example, studies like those by Reilly and Neumann (2022) show that female students in STEM fields report lower levels of perceived inclusion compared to their peers in the humanities, where gender parity is more common. These studies suggest that the culture of certain academic fields, like engineering and computer science, often aligns with masculine norms, creating barriers for female students. This contrasts with fields like education and social sciences, where female students feel more supported.

Urban-rural differences in students' perceptions of gender equality are shaped by varying cultural and educational norms. Studies by Mukherjee and Choudhury (2020) indicate that rural students often internalize more traditional gender roles due to the prevailing cultural norms in their communities. Alston (2021) argues that limited exposure to gender equity discourse in rural areas can reinforce conservative views on gender roles among students. In contrast, urban students benefit from broader exposure to diverse perspectives, often through media and educational programs, which can foster views that are more egalitarian.

This study is important because it explains how educational, social, and cultural elements interact to develop students' complicated perceptions on gender equality in Lahore. The findings that direct the creation of focused educational programs in Pakistan to meet particular possibilities and obstacles for gender equality are among the practical ramifications. Additionally, this research is essential in establishing policies that are suited to Pakistan's educational system and foster a welcoming atmosphere for a variety of student groups. Through addressing gender equality in education, dispelling misunderstandings, and promoting inclusive social norms, interventions in line with local cultural norms are informed by insights into the subtle cultural aspects influencing attitudes towards gender equality.

The changing trends of students' perceptions of gender equality in educational settings are the focus of this study. Understanding potential perception gaps between male and female students, researching how fields of study affect these viewpoints, and examining how geographic environment shapes attitudes towards gender equality represent a few of the main topics of attention. In order to provide targeted solutions that address the particular difficulties faced by different kinds of students, the research attempts to identify the factors influencing these perceptions. The study also looks into how students' perspectives are impacted by gender equility and how these perceptions may affect the creation of inclusive and equitable educational practices and policies.

Research Objectives

Following are the research objectives of the study:

1. To analyze whether there are significant differences in perceptions of gender equality based on the students' gender.
2. To compare the students' perception about gender equality in term of subject.
3. To compare the students' perception about gender equality in term of locality.

Methodology

This study is descriptive and survey type based on quantitative data. The population for this study consists of students enrolled in the Education and Psychology departments of one public and one private university located in Lahore. These universities represent a diverse range of academic environments, with the public university typically catering to a larger, more diverse student body, while the private university may attract students from different socio-economic backgrounds.

The focus on Education and Psychology departments is relevant as these disciplines are directly related to human behavior, societal norms, and educational practices, making their students more likely to have a vested interest or awareness of gender equality issues. These students are, therefore, an appropriate population for studying perceptions of gender equality.

Sampling Technique

For this study, a stratified random sampling technique was employed. Stratified sampling ensures that different subgroups (strata) within the population are adequately represented in the sample. In this case, the population was first divided based on two criteria:

1. Type of University (Public and Private)
2. Academic Department (Education and Psychology)

Within each stratum, participants were randomly selected. This approach ensures that both universities and departments are proportionally represented in the sample, avoiding bias that may result from underrepresentation of any subgroup.

A total of 200 students were selected for the study, with equal representation from each university and department:
- 100 students from the public university (50 from Education, 50 from Psychology)
- 100 students from the private university (50 from Education, 50 from Psychology)

Research Instrument

The data collecting tool were a structured questionnaire designed to collect information on student perceptions of gender equality from public and private sector universities student. The questionnaires belted to verify that they accurately measure the elements that are needed. Perception regarding Gender Equality scale Cronbach's Alpha value is .83.

Gender Wise Distribution
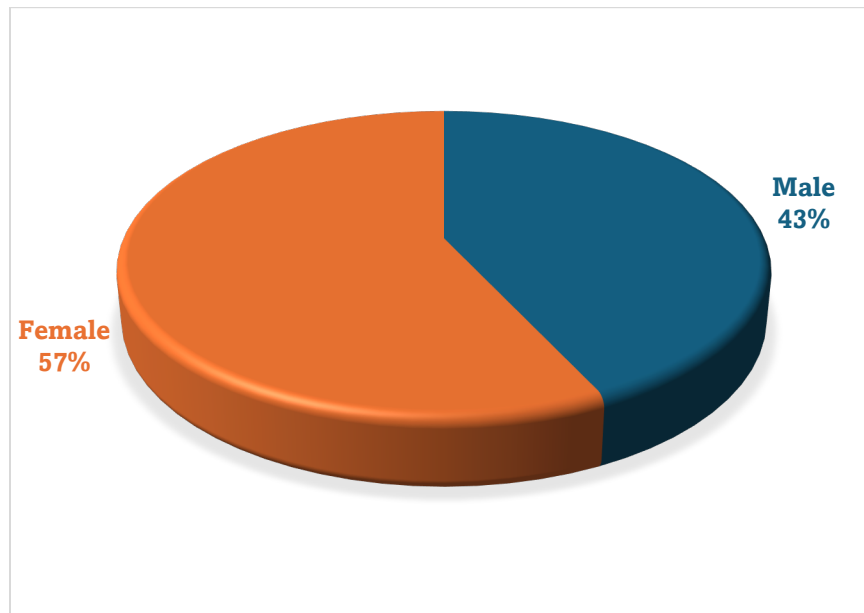
Note. This figure shows the bifurcation of male and female students. There are 57% males and 43% female students.

Is there significance difference in perception of gender equality in term of gender?

Table 1

Students' Perception of Gender Equality in Term of Gender

	Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	p vale
Gender Equality	Male	86	4.15	.34		
	Female	114	4.05	.30	2.73	.007

Table 1 shows that 86 male participants who participate in this survey (M = 4.15, SD = .34) compared to the 114 female participants (M = 4.05, SD = .30) demonstrated significantly difference, t (198) = 2.73, p = .007. So, it is concluded that there is significantly difference between male and female student opinions regarding gender equality. Is there significance difference in perception of gender equality in term of subject?

Table 2

Students' Perception of Gender Equality in Term of Subject

	Group Statistics					
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	p vale
Gender equality	Education	75	4.03	.54		
	Psychology	125	4.53	.37	2.25	.06

Table 2 shows that 75 students of education department participate in this survey (M = 4.03, SD = .54) compared to the 125 students of psychology department (M = 4.53, SD = .37) demonstrated significantly difference, t (198) = 2.25, p = .06. So, it is concluded that there is no significant difference between male and female student opinions regarding gender equality.

Is there significance difference in perception of gender equality in term of locality?

Students' Perception of Gender Equality in Term of Locality

Group Statistics						
	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t value	p vale
Gender equality	Public	100	4.32	.37		
	Private	100	4.01	.39	2.78	.02

Table 3 shows that 100 public sector participants who participate in this survey (M = 4.32, SD = .37) compared to the 100 private sector participants (M = 4.01, SD = .39) demonstrated significantly difference, t (198) = 2.78, p = .02. So, it is concluded that there is significantly difference between public and private sector student opinions regarding gender equality.

Discussion

The present study examined how students perceive gender equality across different variables, such as gender, subject of study, and geographic locality (urban versus rural). Understanding these perceptions is crucial as they shape societal attitudes toward gender roles and influence efforts to promote gender equality within educational and professional environments. The findings from this study revealed significant differences in gender equality perceptions based on the respondents' gender, subject discipline, and locality. These results provide insights into the factors shaping gender-related views among students and highlight areas where educational and policy interventions may be necessary.

The results of the study revealed that male and female students had significantly different perceptions of gender equality. Female students tended to report stronger beliefs in gender equality, while male students showed less inclination toward supporting equal rights across genders. These findings are consistent with prior research, which suggests that women are generally more aware of gender inequalities and more supportive of gender equity initiatives due to their own lived experiences of discrimination (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Hooghe & Stolle, 2004).

This gender disparity can be linked to traditional gender socialization, where males and females are often exposed to different expectations and roles within society. Women's experiences of inequality in personal, educational, or professional contexts often heighten their sensitivity to issues related to gender fairness. Men, on the other hand, may not perceive the same urgency for gender equality, especially if they benefit from existing power structures (Flood, 2007). As such, educational interventions focusing on gender sensitivity training should aim to engage male students more actively in discussions about gender equality and help them recognize the systemic biases that perpetuate inequalities.

The study also explored whether students' perceptions of gender equality varied depending on the subject they were studying. Students from social sciences and humanities demonstrated a greater awareness and more favorable attitudes toward gender equality compared to students from STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields. This aligns with research indicating that students in social science fields are often exposed to critical discussions about gender, power, and inequality as part of their curriculum (Blickenstaff, 2005).

On the contrary, students in STEM fields might not receive the same level of exposure to gender-related issues, which could explain their comparatively lower support for gender equality (Sax et al., 2017). This gap highlights the need for integrating gender studies and equality discussions across all academic disciplines, particularly in fields like STEM, where gender disparities are known to exist (UNESCO, 2017). By introducing

gender equity discussions in STEM curricula, educational institutions can help foster a more holistic understanding of these issues across disciplines, encouraging future professionals in these fields to actively contribute to achieving gender balance.

The study also found that geographic locality (urban versus rural) played a significant role in shaping students' perceptions of gender equality. Urban students, particularly those from metropolitan areas, expressed more progressive views on gender equality compared to their rural counterparts. This finding reflects the broader societal divide between urban and rural areas in terms of exposure to modern ideologies, including gender equality (Alsina et al., 2013).

Urban areas, being more cosmopolitan, tend to have higher exposure to diverse cultures, ideologies, and gender norms, which can foster greater awareness and acceptance of gender equality (Domina, 2005). Rural areas, on the other hand, may adhere more strongly to traditional gender roles, influenced by more conservative social norms and lower exposure to gender equality movements. These findings suggest that gender equality initiatives need to be tailored to the specific sociocultural context of rural areas. Schools and educational institutions in rural regions could benefit from targeted programs that challenge traditional gender norms and promote gender-equitable thinking.

The intersection of gender, subject of study, and locality produced nuanced findings in this study. For instance, urban female students in social sciences were the most supportive of gender equality, while rural male students in STEM fields exhibited the least progressive views. This intersectional approach highlights the complexity of gender equality perceptions, showing that a student's locality and field of study can reinforce or mitigate traditional gender beliefs. This finding supports the argument that gender equality is a multidimensional issue that cannot be fully understood by looking at single variables in isolation (Crenshaw, 1991).

Education systems need to address these intersections by promoting inclusive policies and curricula that are sensitive to both gender and locality-based differences. For example, rural students in STEM programs might benefit from gender-inclusive educational policies that explicitly address both gender equity and the cultural norms in rural settings. On the other hand, urban educational institutions can work toward ensuring that even within progressive settings, all subjects, including STEM, receive adequate attention regarding gender equality.

The findings of this study underscore the importance of embedding gender equality education into school curricula, particularly in regions and disciplines where such discussions may be lacking. Educational institutions must develop gender-responsive pedagogy that fosters critical thinking around issues of gender equality and challenges traditional gender norms. Interventions should also be localized, recognizing that students from rural areas may have different starting points in terms of their exposure to gender issues compared to their urban counterparts.

Furthermore, the gender disparity in perceptions highlights the need for more comprehensive gender education, particularly targeted toward male students. This could involve workshops, seminars, and discussions that actively engage men in conversations about gender equality, helping them to see how they, too, can benefit from a more equitable society.

Conclusion

This study explored student perceptions of gender equality by comparing responses across gender, subject of study, and locality (urban vs. rural). The findings revealed significant gender differences, with female students demonstrating stronger support for gender equality than their male counterparts. This supports existing research

that highlights women's greater awareness of gender inequities, likely due to their direct experiences with societal gender norms and discrimination.

Furthermore, the subject of study also played a key role, with students from social sciences expressing more progressive views compared to those in STEM fields. This can be attributed to the fact that social sciences often include discussions on gender, power dynamics, and social justice, whereas such topics are not as prominent in STEM curricula. The study also showed that locality influences gender perceptions, with urban students displaying a greater understanding of and support for gender equality compared to rural students, likely due to urban exposure to more progressive ideals and diverse social norms.

However, no single variable fully explains students' perceptions; the interaction between gender, subject, and locality adds complexity to these results. This intersectionality suggests that promoting gender equality in educational settings requires multifaceted approaches that address both individual and contextual factors.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to promote gender equality awareness and foster equitable perceptions among students:

1. Institutions should incorporate discussions on gender equality across all academic disciplines, including STEM. This would ensure that students in all fields are exposed to critical gender issues and their implications for both personal and professional development. Offering interdisciplinary courses or modules focusing on gender equity, social justice, and human rights could be effective.
2. Educational institutions should develop gender-sensitive curricula that challenge traditional gender roles and stereotypes. Teachers and educators need to be trained in gender-inclusive pedagogy, ensuring that their teaching methods encourage students to question societal norms and reflect on gender equality. Special emphasis should be placed on schools and universities in rural areas where more traditional views of gender may prevail.
3. Given the significant gender gap in perceptions, male students, in particular, should be targeted with specific gender awareness programs. Workshops, seminars, and peer discussions could help engage men in the conversation about gender equality, making them more aware of the benefits of equitable practices and encouraging their active involvement in promoting gender balance.
4. Since students from rural areas exhibited less- progressive views on gender equality, educational institutions and policymakers need to develop targeted programs to promote gender equity in these regions. Campaigns that involve the community, raise awareness about the importance of gender equality, and challenge traditional gender norms should be prioritized in rural schools and universities.
5. Mentor ship programs that promote gender equality can have a positive impact on students' perceptions. Institutions can facilitate partnerships between students and mentors from various fields, particularly women in leadership positions, to provide role models for both male and female students and demonstrate the value of gender equality in academic and professional success.
6. Schools and universities should create safe and open environments where students can freely discuss gender issues. These spaces would enable students from different backgrounds to share their experiences, challenge biases, and collaborate on initiatives that promote gender equality on campus and beyond.
7. Governments and educational bodies should consider policy-level interventions that mandate gender equality training and education at both secondary and higher education levels. Policies should also encourage gender-sensitive research in various fields to ensure that students graduate with a well-rounded understanding of gender dynamics in society.

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