Policy Research Journal
ISSN (E): 3006-7030 ISSN (P): 3006-7022 Volume 3, Issue 6, 2025

# GENDER DISPARITY IN LEARNING ACHIEVEMENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: INSIGHTS FROM A LITERATURE REVIEW

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**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15908375

**Keywords**
*Gender Disparity, Learning Achievements, Classroom, Tertiary Education, Higher Education*

**Article History**
Received: 15 March, 2025
Accepted: 15 June, 2025
Published: 30 June, 2025

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**Abstract**
*This study has been intended to explore review based evidence on gender disparity in higher education achievements among students. This study has been based on a qualitative study and is exploratory in nature. It has been based on the published research documents on the subject, as mentioned above. Different published documents have been extracted from digital databases, including Web of Science, Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, SAGE, Springer Nature, Taylor & Francis, and other available databases at the university library. A total of 125 research documents have been extracted from the mentioned databases. The process of article extraction has been continued till the point of saturation. The inclusion criteria include a title that contains gender disparity in learning achievements and is published in a peer-reviewed journal. A thematic analysis has been used to present the data in the results and discussion section of the paper. The overall study concludes that gender inequality in the classroom, enrolment, and learning settings has effects on disparity in educational achievements. Consistently, the qualitative analysis asserts that accessible resources have effects on inequality in learning achievements among students at tertiary levels. Similarly, the study findings conclude that culturally relevant teaching materials, gender inequality in communication, and policy institutional support have effects on disparity in learning achievements.*

## INTRODUCTION

Government policies and educational frameworks also have a significant impact on whether gender disparities in education are reduced or maintained (Shoaib & Zaman, 2025). Although many nations have implemented policies to promote gender equality in education, implementation issues still exist (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025). Funding for girls' education is inadequate, teachers are not adequately trained in gender-sensitive teaching practices, and laws protecting girls from child labor and early marriage are not strictly enforced, which contributes to the persistent educational divide (Shoaib, Tariq, Rasool, & Iqbal, 2025). Similarly, it is ensuring that both boys and girls receive equal encouragement and support in their learning journeys (Shoaib, Tariq, & Iqbal, 2025b). Policymakers have to prioritize gender-responsive policies, such as scholarships for girls, incentives for families to educate their daughters, and

initiatives that support female leadership in education (Shoaib, Tariq, & Iqbal, 2025a). Gender-sensitive approaches have been incorporated into teacher training programs (Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025). In some countries, especially high-income and middle-income countries, boys have higher dropout rates than girls, often because of economic pressures to work and support their families (Shoaib, Shamsher, & Iqbal, 2025). In some societies, the impression that boys must take on financial responsibilities at a young age results in lower educational attainment among males (Ganle, 2016). Therefore, addressing gender disparity in education requires a comprehensive approach that takes into account the unique challenges faced by both genders and works toward a balanced and equitable education system (Shoaib, Iqbal, & Iftikhar, 2025). In summary, even education has made great strides toward reducing the gender gap; however, much more work must be done to guarantee that all kids, regardless of gender, have equitable access to high-quality learning opportunities (Shoaib, 2025a). A multifaceted strategy is needed to address gender gaps, including the promotion of gender-sensitive teaching methods, regulatory changes, investments in educational infrastructure, and awareness campaigns (Geduld, 2024). This ongoing worldwide issue is caused by a number of factors, including cultural norms, financial limitations, safety issues, gender bias in curricula, and legislative flaws (Gee, 2018). Gender disparity in education continues to be a widespread problem that takes diverse forms in different educational settings (Bhat, Khurshid, & Hussain, 2011). Boys and girls frequently have distinct opportunities and expectations that affect their academic performance, choices of subjects, and long-term academic outcomes (Findik, 2016). Similarly, disparities in enrollment of the students, opportunities, communication, curriculum, and classroom have also been observed. However, gender disparity in learning results in differences in chances, access, or results depending on gender in higher education. Hence, females faced many hurdles to education in various areas, such as gender-based violence, early marriage, financial limitations, and cultural traditions that prevent them from pursuing higher education. However, in some situations, males were more likely to drop out of school as a result of expectations placed on them by their families or by the socio-economic system to work.

**Objective:** This research paper has been intended to explore review-based evidence on gender disparity in higher education achievements among students.

## The Data and Methods

This study has been based on a qualitative study and is exploratory in nature. It has been based on the published research documents on the subject, as mentioned above. Different published documents have been extracted from digital databases, including Google Scholar, Emerald Insight, Taylor & Francis, SAGE, Web of Science, Springer Nature, and other available databases at the academic library of the university. A total of 125 research documents have been extracted from the mentioned databases. The process of article extraction has been continued till the point of saturation. The inclusion criteria include a title that contains gender disparity in learning achievements, research conducted in higher education, and published in a peer-reviewed journal. A thematic analysis has been used to present the data in the results and discussion section of the paper. Further, the data have been presented qualitatively.

## Results and Discussion

The study findings examine that minimizing gender inequalities and fairness issues in secondary English teaching at higher education level has been based on multiple factors (Younger & Warrington, 2007). Likewise, the argument of the study reveals that opinions of women in education and classroom interactions and disparities at four Caribbean secondary institutions (Younger & Cobbett, 2014). Comparably, the study of Ylonen, Gillespie, and Green (2018) asserted that analyzing disparities and inconsistencies in assessment cultures across higher education disciplines in England. Correspondingly, the study findings show that technical staff changing into educators and the changing role of technical staff in higher education teaching and learning environments (Wragg, Harris, Noyes, & Vere, 2023). Furthermore, the study finding indicates that disparities in Chinese college students' online learning experiences by region and critical factors originated from survey data analysis in higher education institutions also related with several factors (Wang & Li, 2022). In addition, the study findings

conclude that gender differences in enrollment in higher education in Malaysia and understanding and takeaways from the differences in gender (Wan, 2018).

The study findings outline that access and experience of women and disparities in agricultural higher education programs in Africa (Van Houweling, Christie, & Rahim, 2020). Likewise, the study findings examine that creating an inclusive environment in the science learning system for children in Appalachia (Smith-Jackson, Evia, Tabor, & Benson, 2012). Comparably, the argument of study reveals that differences in higher education mergers and the complexities of integrating two distinct institutions and their influence on faculty research productivity (Slade, Ribando, Fortner, & Walker, 2022). Correspondingly, the study of Shabaya and Konadu-Agyemang (2004) asserted that discrimination in access, involvement, and examination of geographical and socio-economic facets of the gender difference in African education, particularly in Ghana, Zimbabwe, and Kenya. Furthermore, the study findings show that moving to evaluation methods for learning in higher education in Ireland built an inclusive learning environment (Scott & Fortune, 2012). In addition, the study's finding indicates the variables determining the gender disparity in higher education (Saadat, Alam, & Rehman, 2022).

The study findings outline that evaluating the way engineering and construction students perceive disparities in gender at the higher education level (Shoaib, 2025b). Likewise, the study findings examine that work-based learning's progress and gender based disparities in EU higher education views from the project (Perusso & Wagenaar, 2022). Comparably, the argument of study reveals that gender differences in higher education classroom rules and regulations investigate inherent effects on learning, professional qualities, and safety (Shoaib, Zaman, & Abbas, 2024). Correspondingly, the study of Owusu et al. (2024) asserted that in a Ghanaian higher education institution, gender inequalities and distance-learning students experience academic stress and burnout. Furthermore, the study findings show that lecturers' thoughts on rudeness and disparities among students in Afghanistan's higher education (Shoaib, 2025b). In addition, the study finding indicates that disparities significantly affect the clinical learning environment (Shoaib, 2025a). In the same vein, the study findings conclude that the environment for clinical learning using learning analytics in a remote learning environment can identify disparities in academic achievement and behavioral engagement (Shoaib et al., 2024).

The study findings outline that higher education's localization in China and its societal ramifications and disparities in gender learning (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2024b). Likewise, the study findings examine disparities in learning while completing youth internships in Singapore (Mirchandani & Bhutani, 2023). Comparably, the argument of study reveals that the contribution of instructional methods and subject matter to the development of equitable and sustainable learning outcomes in higher education (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2024a). Correspondingly, the study of Meyer, Taylor, and Peter (2015) asserted that gender and sexual diversity inclusive learning and disparities to contrast the views of heterosexual, gay, lesbian, and bisexual educators. Furthermore, the study findings show that examining perceptions and prejudice about racial differences in student performance in British higher education (Shoaib, 2021). In addition, the study finding indicates that examining the relationship between students' preferences for and use of virtual learning environments and disparities in their academic performance in earth science in the 10th grade (Lin, Tutwiler, & Chang, 2011). In the same vein, the study findings conclude that the impact of gender-based microaggressions and learning settings on the physical space of pedagogy and communication (Shoaib et al., 2024a).

The study findings outline the relationship between gender differences in Sub-Saharan Africa's reading proficiency and school attendance (Kyei, 2021). Likewise, the study findings examine that disparities in achievement affect medical students' emotions and their likelihood of self-regulated learning and feeling stress in the learning environment (Khoshnaghsh, Irfan, Tukur Jido, & Zahra, 2023). Comparably, the argument of the study reveals that children from Nepal's rural Dalit community face a barrier to equitable learning (Khanal, 2015). Correspondingly, the study of Joseph Jeyaraj and Wald (2020) asserted that views of students of classroom barriers and

disparities to furthering higher education social goals. Furthermore, the study findings show implications for resolving racial inequities in school discipline and authoritative school climate (Heilbrun, Cornell, & Konold, 2018). In addition, the study finding indicates that disparities in learning possibilities based on race and economic status, as well as access to qualified teachers (Hanselman, 2019). In the same vein, the study findings conclude that disparities in school-age children's motor skills significantly affect motor skills according to gender and socioeconomic status (Gosselin, Leone, & Laberge, 2021).

The study findings outline that gender cooperation contributes to promoting inclusive learning environments at the higher education level (Shoaib, Ali, & Abbas, 2024). Likewise, the study findings examine the gender disparity in higher education and the significance of cognitive and inclusive learning with several factors (Shoaib, 2024e). Comparably, the argument of study reveals that gender and socioeconomic disparities in at-home education during the pandemic, examining the functions of the family setting and educational materials (Shoaib, 2024d). Correspondingly, the study of Danvers (2023) asserted that the effects of gender disparities in the learning environment have an impact on education pedagogy in UK higher education. Furthermore, the study findings show that economic inequalities affect the social learning environment of students at the higher education level (Shoaib, 2024b). In addition, the study's finding indicates the impact of power imbalance and gender diversity on the intellectual complexity of groups in a cooperative learning environment at higher education (Shoaib, 2024c). In the same token, the study findings conclude that learning environment and educational excellence are affected by disparities in higher education (Shoaib, 2024a).

The study findings outline that reducing discipline discrepancies for male pupils by linking flexible underlying issues to workable solutions in learning (Shoaib, Usmani, & Abdullah, 2023). Likewise, the study findings examine how meeting the requirements of different students in a learning Christian higher education environment (Cole & Butcher, 2023). Comparably, the argument of study reveals that examining the home learning environments of Syrian refugee children in Turkey ahead of COVID-19 to identify disparities throughout the pandemic (Colak Oz, Aran, Aktakke, Üçkardeşler, & Hajhassan, 2023). Correspondingly, the study of Cheryan et al. (2020) asserted that threats to identity expression indicate larger gender differences in computer science students at the higher education level. Furthermore, the study findings show that recognizing a different face in the digital crowd and reconsidering the learning environment in higher education by using an online care pedagogy (Shoaib, Shehzadi, & Abbas, 2023). In addition, the study finding indicates that analysis of disparities in higher education that affect the active learning environment (Shoaib, 2023c). In the same way, the study findings conclude that inequalities in social and ethnic backgrounds in the utilization of early education facilities are beneficial for learning environments (Shoaib, 2023b).

The study findings outline that computers in remote learning and disparities in how women perceive their ability to use computers at the higher education level (Atan, Azli, Rahman, & Idrus, 2002). Likewise, the study findings examine that disparities in components of humanistic education significantly affect the blended learning environment at higher education (Al-Obaydi, 2023). Comparably, the argument of the study reveals that dismantling the barriers to environmental sustainability in higher education that are based on justice (Ajaps, 2023). Correspondingly, the study of Adejare, Gautam, Madzia, and Mersha (2022) asserted that utilizing machine learning and electronic medical records to investigate racial differences in students at the higher education level. Furthermore, the study findings show that inequalities in the social learning environment affect adult women's education at the university level (Acharya, Jere, & Robinson-Pant, 2019). In addition, the study finding indicates that issues of gender disparities in Yoruba literacy and enrollment in Southwest Nigeria (Ogunjuyigbe & Fadeyi, 2002). In the same vein, the study findings conclude that gender differences affect the agricultural learning environments and development among smallholders in Western Uganda (Midamba & Ouko, 2024).

The study findings outline that evaluating gender bias in higher education student satisfaction through a cross-disciplinary study (Shoaib, 2023a). Likewise, it has also been examined that Ferdowsi University of

Mashhad, Iran, is implementing a gender disparity effects responsive pedagogy in response to the feminization of the urban planning discipline (Shoaib, 2021). Comparably, the argument of study reveals that gender differences in academic research and assessment of inclusive learning environment at the higher education level (Shoaib, Tariq, Shahzadi, & Ali, 2022). Correspondingly, the study of Baber (2024) asserted that gender disparities in social science university students' perspectives on the impacts of differences in learning environment at the university level. Furthermore, the study findings show evidence from different countries on the impacts of gender disparity in the learning environment in different departments at universities (Ali, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2022; Ullah & Shoaib, 2021). In addition, the study finding indicates that gender differences in university faculty members' and students' mental health issues and preparation for distance learning during the epidemic (Shoaib & Ullah, 2021a). In the same token, the study findings conclude that differential chances and results that students encounter depending on their gender are highlighted by gender gaps in learning (Shoaib & Ullah, 2021b).

The study findings outline that significant impacts of gender differences on the behavior and lifestyle of students in the learning environment at higher education (Zheng et al., 2022). Likewise, the study findings examine that gender disparities in the classroom affect the collaborative learning of European students at higher education (Tverdostup & Paas, 2022). Comparably, the argument of the study reveals that gender disparity in academic achievements significantly affects the supportive classroom environment in UK universities (McCarry & Jones, 2022; Abdullah et al., 2024). Correspondingly, the study of Lewis, Dawson, Shappie, Braitman, and Heron (2022) asserted that disparity in the classroom is defined as when pupils achieve different results due to socioeconomic position. Furthermore, the study findings show that using the native learning techniques to address racial disparities in school punishment is a transformative agent for justice (Ko, Bal, Bird Bear, Sannino, & Engeström, 2022). In addition, the study finding indicates that disparities in student engagement behaviors and enrollment motivations significantly affect the academic learning environment at higher education (Hsieh, 2022). In the same token, the study findings conclude that learning and motivating attitudes among students are easily enhanced by an inclusive learning environment at the university level (Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025a, 2025b; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025; Shoaib, Waris, & Iqbal, 2025; Li & Singh, 2022; Abdullah, Usmani, & Shoaib, 2023).

The study findings outline that gender differences affect the collaborative learning opportunities and students' behaviors at the university level (Nigri, Levantesi, & Marino, 2021). Likewise, the study findings examine the significant effects of gender inequalities on the learning environment of social sciences students at higher education (Engel, Mayersen, Pedersen, & Eidenfalk, 2021). Comparably, the argument of the study reveals that gender inequalities affect the students' enrollment in the Malaysian higher education system (Wan, 2018). Correspondingly, the study of Lee (2018) asserted that university students are affected by unequal distributions of facilities in the learning environment. Furthermore, the study findings show that gender disparities in high schools can disturb the learning environment of students and the mental health of the students (Watt, Huerta, & Martinez, 2017). In addition, the study finding indicates that evidence from the private schooling system in India among school students and disparity on the basis of socioeconomic status and gender differences (Sahoo, 2017). In the same token, the study findings conclude that the learning environment of senior students of the university and reading satisfaction are significantly affected by gender, age, and disparities (Abdullah, Matloob, & Malik, 2024; Yang, Hsu, & Chen, 2016).

The study findings outline that gender disparities and power disparities have effects on accessible resources in learning environments (Shoaib, Iqbal, & Tahira, 2021). Likewise, the study findings examine that gender disparity affects the policy and institutional environment in the learning environment of the students at the higher education level (Shoaib, Fatima, & Jamil, 2021). Comparably, the argument of the study reveals that gender inequalities in students on a religious basis significantly affect the learning environment of students at higher education (Shoaib, Ali, & Akbar, 2021). Correspondingly, the study of Beaty and Davis (2012) asserted that gender

differences in enrollment affect the classroom support environment of learning at the tertiary level. Furthermore, the study findings show that disparities in learning opportunities on the basis of gender significantly affect the inclusive learning environment of students at Ohio University (Starkweather, 2007). In addition, the study finding indicates that the analysis of gender disparities in the learning environment of elementary school classrooms based on learning resources (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2021). In the same token, the study findings conclude that gender base disparity significantly affects peer interaction in the learning environment (Ali, Shoaib, & Abdullah, 2021).

The study findings outline that gender bias in student evaluations affects the learning of students at the higher education level (Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021). Likewise, the study findings examine disparities in gender-based learning environments of college students in different countries (Ahmad, Ahmad, Shoaib, & Shaukat, 2021). Comparably, the argument of the study reveals that classroom disruptiveness and disparities in the learning environment are based on gender (Abdullah & Shoaib, 2021). Correspondingly, the study of Parker and Leviten-Reid (2022) asserted that students' disproportionate representation in specific academic subjects is indicative of gender disparities in American education. Furthermore, the study findings show that the learning environment was significantly affected by gender disparities during the pandemic (Shoaib, Abdullah, & Ali, 2020). In addition, the study finding indicates that disparities in school-age children on the basis of economic condition significantly affect the learning environment of the students (Shoaib & Ullah, 2019). In the same vein, the study findings conclude that flexible instructional methods in classrooms are affected by disparity (Kausar, Manaf, & Shoaib, 2022; Abdullah, & Ullah, 2022).

The study findings outline that gender non-formal significantly affects the learning environment in South Korea (Kwon, Park, & Byun, 2020). Likewise, the study findings examine that gender inequalities in undergraduate students have an impact on the learning environment in Australia (Fisher, Thompson, & Brookes, 2020). Comparably, the argument of the study reveals that social differences in undergraduate subject selections are influenced by students' perceived competence and level of interest in higher education (Codiroli McMaster, 2019; Abdullah, Nisar, & Malik, 2024). Correspondingly, the study of Wan and Chan (2018) asserted that casinos affect the learning environment of the students at the tertiary level. Furthermore, the study findings show that gender differences in class and loneliness significantly affect communication skills in school education (Lawal & Idemudia, 2018). In addition, the study's finding indicates that a worldwide perspective on gender inequality in the learning environment significantly affects academic achievements at higher education (Clark & Mesch, 2018). In the same token, the study findings conclude that the learning management system of educational institutions significantly affects the resources of students at the tertiary level (De Smet, Schellens, De Wever, Brandt-Pomares, & Valcke, 2016; Abdullah, & Ullah, 2016).

The study findings outline that gender differences in the learning environment significantly affect the empowerment system and learning skills of the students at higher education (Ali et al., 2022). Likewise, the study findings examine the policy and attitudes, reasons for the gender gap in post-allocation for graduate students' education in several Muslim countries (Shoaib, 2025a). Comparably, the argument of the study reveals that gender plays a significant role in an inclusive learning environment for foreign language learning in Muslim secondary schools (Shoaib, 2025b). Correspondingly, the study of Ikoya (2009) asserted that gender dissimilarities exist in the use of preventive discipline practices in the learning environment of secondary school principals in Nigeria. Furthermore, the study findings show that gender differences significantly affect the mental health of students at the tertiary level (Shoaib, 2024d). In addition, the study finding indicates that gender differences in self-concept computer skills in distance education at higher education significantly affect the learning environment. (Atan et al., 2002; Abdullah, & Nisar, 2024). In the same token, the study findings conclude that gender disparities significantly affect the performance of undergraduates in the USA (Tai & Sadler, 2001).

**Theoretical Review**

**Biological Determinism:** The biological proponent argued that males and females' variations in biological differences predict specific roles, talents, and behaviors that result in gender disparity (Miller & Costello, 2001). Similarly, gender variations in learning outcomes, interests, and capacities are less influenced by social, cultural, or environmental factors, but rather have biological roots (Penner, 2008). Such deterministic viewpoints impede the development of equitable practices in inclusive educational environments by encouraging teachers to unintentionally prefer one gender over another, which reinforces prejudices and limits chances for participation and performance in academia (Graves Jr, 2015). These determinants focused on the biological characteristics of males and females in academic performance in educational institutions.

**Psychological Determinism:**

The psychological proponents focused on the psychological aspects of male and female students. There were consequences for understanding gender disparities in learning achievements that hold individual actions, attitudes, and cognitive capacities molded by internal psychological processes (McPherson, Banchefsky, & Park, 2018). This viewpoint frequently implied that psychological variables, including personality traits, cognitive preferences, and early developmental experiences, were the main causes of gender variations in learning styles, motivation, and academic achievement at all levels (Lee, Reis, & Rogge, 2020). These notions rise to presumptions in an inclusive educational setting that males and females naturally do better in particular topics or activities based on their "innate" psychological characteristics (Condit et al., 2009). Hence, psychological proponents rejected the notion of biological determinism and supported the argument that gender disparity had been linked with the psychological domain of male and female students.

**Post-structuralism:**

Gender Disparity in learning achievements has been critically examined through the lens of post-structuralism, a theoretical paradigm that emphasizes the flexibility of concepts and challenges fixed meanings towards academic performance (Humes & Bryce, 2003). They questioned the concept of gender itself, contending that it was a socially and culturally constructed discourse rather than an innate trait, in contrast to traditional viewpoints that perceived gender as a stable and binary category (Peters, 2003). According to this viewpoint, gender differences in education are not inherent or unavoidable, but rather the product of institutional practices, language use, and power dynamics that influence gender identities (Peters & Humes, 2003). Deconstructing conventional beliefs about gender roles in the classroom and acknowledging the diversity and complexity of identities were key components of post-structuralism (Rømer, 2021). Hence, the post-structuralism proponents argued that the difference between male and female students had been based on socio-cultural factors rather than biological or psychological factors. Gender had been socially and culturally constructed, and academic performance had been linked with social and cultural factors.

**Feministic Point of View:**

Feminist proponents argued that gender disparity in learning achievements had been based on the result of structural injustices and power disparities originating from patriarchal systems (Lather, 1992). According to feminist proponents, educational methods, curricula, and classroom dynamics are socially constructed and sustain these discrepancies, rather than being the product of inherent gender differences (Robeyns, 2003). The gendered classification of disciplines, textbook representations of male and female characters, and teachers' expectations were only a few examples of gender bias that appear subtly but persistently in several educational environments (Subrahmanian, 2005). The feminist perspective advocated for an educational system that actively addressed gender-based gaps to promote equal opportunities and achievements for all students (Harding & Norberg, 2005). Hence, the feminist proponents argued that gender disparity in learning achievements had been linked with structural injustice. Therefore, gender disparity in learning has been linked with the power distribution in the patriarchal system of Pakistan.

**Conclusion**

The overall study concludes that gender inequality in the classroom, enrolment, and learning settings has

effects on disparity in educational achievements. Likewise, the data analysis based on existing reviews shows that a supportive classroom environment and gender inequality in residential backgrounds have effects on disparity in learning achievements. Consistently, the qualitative analysis asserts that accessible resources have effects on inequality in learning achievements among students at tertiary levels. Similarly, the study findings conclude that culturally relevant teaching materials, gender inequality in communication, and policy institutional support have effects on disparity in learning achievements. Likewise, the analysis reveals that collaborative learning opportunities and flexible instructional methods have effects on inequality in learning achievements. Furthermore, equitable assessment methods also have effects on disparities in learning achievements.

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