

Facilitating Gender Justice in Education: an Analytical Study on Teachers' Role in Women's Empowerment and Social Change in Assam

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Abstract

This review paper explores the role of teachers' beliefs and pedagogical practices in shaping women's empowerment within Assam's educational landscape. Women's empowerment through education is increasingly recognized as a cornerstone for achieving social equity and sustainable development. However, in Assam, persistent gender disparities, socio-cultural constraints, and unequal learning opportunities continue to hinder women's full participation in education. Drawing upon national and regional literature, the paper highlights how teachers' attitudes, expectations, and gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches critically influence female students' motivation, academic achievement, and self-confidence. Studies reveal that while many educators in Assam display supportive attitudes towards women's empowerment, subtle biases and traditional classroom practices still reinforce gender hierarchies. By synthesizing evidence from existing research, the paper underlines the urgent need for teacher training, curriculum reform, and policy interventions that promote equitable classroom practices. Ultimately, the study argues that teachers in Assam hold a decisive role not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as agents of social change, making their beliefs and practices pivotal in shaping the trajectory of women's empowerment in the region.

Keywords: Teacher beliefs, Pedagogical practices, Women's empowerment, Gender equality in education, Educational landscape, Gender-sensitive pedagogy, Teacher attitudes

1. Introduction

Between 2000 and 2025, Assam has witnessed a gradual but perceptible shift in its educational landscape, revealing both progress and persistent disparities impacting women's empowerment. As of 2024, the state's overall literacy rate stood at approximately 72.19 percent, with male literacy at 77.85 percent and female literacy significantly lower at 66.27 percent, underscoring enduring gender gaps in access to education (Wikipedia, 2025). Importantly, teachers through their attitudes, classroom conduct, and representation play a pivotal role in shaping gender norms and empowering female students. In rural Assam, a recent study of in-service teachers found pervasive gender stereotyping in classroom activities, illustrating how inherent biases can influence girls' engagement and self-belief (Das, 2024). Simultaneously, women's literary movements such as the *Sadou Asom Lekhika Samaroh Samiti*, founded in 1974, have fostered cultural avenues for creative expression, contributing to broader empowerment narratives within teaching and educational discourses (Sadou Asom Lekhika Samaroh Samiti, 2025). By exploring these intersections of literacy, educator attitudes, and literary-cultural frameworks, this seminar aims to illuminate how modern education in Assam shapes and is shaped by women's empowerment.

1.1 Review of Related Literature

Research over the past two decades has consistently shown that teacher attitudes and beliefs play a critical role in shaping gender outcomes in education. Rakshit and Sahoo (2023) analysed large-scale Indian learning outcome data and found that teacher bias significantly reduces girls' cognitive and non-cognitive gains, contributing to persistent gender gaps. In Assam's context, the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT, 2017) conducted a textbook content analysis and reported that visuals and narratives in Assamese textbooks often reinforce stereotypical gender roles, underlining the need for curriculum reform and teacher sensitization. Similarly, (Das, 2024) examined rural Assam schools and revealed that teacher encouragement is often gendered, particularly in science subjects, restricting girls' aspirations.

Studies in early childhood education also highlight the formative influence of teacher perceptions. Sarma *et al.* (2024), in a qualitative study in Jorhat district, found that preschool teachers hold implicit gendered assumptions that shape early learning experiences, calling for targeted pre-service and in-service training. (Saikia, 2023), in a Kamrup district college teacher survey, reported that while many educators express theoretical support for gender equality, these beliefs are not consistently translated into classroom practice. UNESCO's (2006) policy review confirmed that the presence of women teachers increases girls'

enrolment, yet stressed that attitudes and pedagogical approaches determine the extent of empowerment.

Broader state-level studies, such as Abdul (2019), show persistent gender gaps in literacy and enrolment in Assam, with variation across districts linked to institutional and teacher-related factors. Program evaluations of Mahila Samakhya initiatives (Sharma, 2024) emphasise that community-based education works best when teachers actively foster empowerment. (Mandal, 2018) similarly noted that textbooks perpetuate occupational and social role stereotypes, which can undermine gender equity efforts unless countered by teachers. The National Education Policy 2020 (Government of India, 2020) identifies teacher education reforms as essential for delivering gender-responsive classrooms, an approach particularly relevant for Assam's diverse socio-cultural settings.

Data from DISE and ASER reports (2010–2020) reveal significant district-level disparities in girls' retention and subject choice, often reflecting the local teacher workforce's attitudes. Research with B.Ed. trainees (2018–2024) indicates that while female trainees tend to express stronger egalitarian views, stereotypical career expectations persist, suggesting the need for curriculum-based gender sensitisation. Ghosh (2016) reviewed national literature and found recurring evidence that teacher beliefs and classroom interactions are central to the reproduction of gender inequality in schools. NCERT and other content analyses (2017–2021) confirm the under-representation of women in professional roles in textbooks, with teachers' capacity for critical pedagogy emerging as a crucial countermeasure.

In the early years, teacher expectations have been linked to long-term educational trajectories, as shown in both Assam-specific and broader Indian studies (Sarma *et al.*, 2024). Program evaluations of girls' retention initiatives in tea-garden and rural areas (2010–2025) highlight the success of interventions that integrate gender training for teachers. Similarly, STEM participation research demonstrates that lower levels of encouragement for girls in science subjects correlate with reduced uptake in higher secondary streams. Community-level empowerment studies in Assam (2015–2024) show that while education increases women's agency, entrenched social norms and school-level factors, including teacher attitudes, can moderate these gains. Reviews of teacher professional development (2005–2023) stress that generic training rarely shifts gender attitudes; instead, practice-embedded and gender-specific mentoring has greater impact. Finally, open and distance learning (ODL) programs in Assam (RSIS International, 2025) reveal expanded access for women but caution that without gender-responsive facilitation, such platforms may fall short of genuine empowerment.

1.2 Significance of the Study

Over the past two decades, Assam has witnessed substantial socio-economic and educational transformations, with modern education emerging as a key driver for women's empowerment. However, the extent to which this potential is realized largely depends on the attitudes and perceptions of teachers, who act as the primary facilitators of learning. In the context of Assam where traditional norms, cultural practices, and regional disparities often shape gender roles, teachers' beliefs and pedagogical approaches can either reinforce gender biases or foster equality.

From 2000 to 2025, government initiatives such as *Beti Bachao Beti Padhao*, expansion of girls' scholarships, and the implementation of the National Education Policy (2020) have aimed to promote gender-inclusive education. Despite these efforts, persistent issues such as unequal participation in various fields, lower female representation in higher education leadership, and socio-cultural resistance to women's full participation highlight the need to examine the subtle but powerful influence of teachers' attitudes on educational outcomes for girls and women.

This study is significant as it bridges the gap between policy intent and classroom reality in Assam. By systematically analyzing literature spanning 25 years, it reveals how teacher attitudes shaped by cultural values, institutional constraints, and evolving educational frameworks impact women's empowerment through education. The findings will inform teacher training programmes, curriculum design, and policy reforms, ensuring that educational spaces in Assam are more equitable and inclusive. Ultimately, the study contributes to strengthening the role of modern education as a transformative tool for advancing gender equality and fostering women's active participation in socio-economic and cultural life.

From this point of view, it is crucial to examine the extent to which individuals are exposed to the empowerment process and the degree to which they have actually been empowered. Such an inquiry requires a systematic assessment of the various indicators of empowerment present in Assam. In line with this objective, the present study has been designed to explore and analyze the empowerment of women through education.

1.3 Objectives of the Present Study

The aim of this study is to investigate and analyse the specific objectives and goals that are to be achieved through the research conducted.

1. To Examine Teachers' Attitudes towards Women's Empowerment in Modern Education in Assam.

2. To analyze the impact of Teachers' attitudes on Women Students' Academic Performance and Motivation.
3. To examine the relationship between Teachers' attitudes and Women Empowerment in educational settings.
4. To Identify Socio-Cultural and Institutional Barriers and Strategies for promoting Positive Teachers' Attitudes and Women Empowerment in Modern Education in Assam.

1.4 Research Methodology

This Seminar paper adopts a descriptive and analytical approach, conducting a comprehensive literature review on the topics of Modern Education, Teacher Attitudes, Assam, NEP 2020, and Women Empowerment.

2. Data Analysis

The process of examining and interpreting data in order to uncover meaningful patterns, relationships, and insights. The collection of literature presented below elucidates the importance of the research problem from several vantage points. The review has been organised under various thematic categories, including:

3. Result and Discussion

Objective 1: to Examine Teachers' Attitudes towards Women's Empowerment in Education in Assam

Teachers' attitudes play a decisive role in shaping women's empowerment through education. (Sen, 1999) described empowerment as expanding women's capabilities and choices, which schools can nurture only if teachers provide equitable opportunities. (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968) showed that teachers' expectations influence students' motivation, while Stromquist (2015) emphasized that gender-sensitive pedagogy is vital for empowerment.

In India, Nambissan (1999) highlighted that subtle teacher biases often reinforce traditional gender roles, and Kingdon (2007) argued that positive teacher attitudes encourage higher enrolment and retention of girls. Extending this to Assam, Das (2016) found that teachers who mentor and motivate girls significantly improve their confidence and decision-making. Similarly, Talukdar (2017) noted that many rural Assamese girls pursued higher studies only when teachers inspired them to aspire beyond secondary education.

Baruah (2020) further showed that supportive teachers enabled girls to take part in debates, cultural activities, and student leadership, enhancing empowerment. However,

challenges remain. Gogoi (2015) observed that Assamese classrooms often lack gender sensitivity, with boys given more visibility in academic tasks. Bhuyan (2019) argued that teacher training rarely addresses gender equity, limiting teachers' ability to promote empowerment. Hazarika (2018) added that without community support, teacher efforts sometimes fail to overcome entrenched patriarchal barriers.

On a positive note, Nath (2021) stressed that female teachers in rural Assam serve as role models, inspiring girls to pursue education and careers. Gogoi and Dutta (2022) highlighted that government schemes such as scholarships and bicycles succeed best when teachers actively encourage girls to benefit from them.

Overall, literature suggests that in Assam, teachers' attitudes are central to whether education merely imparts literacy or becomes a genuine force of empowerment. Encouragement, equitable practices, and mentorship by teachers can transform women students into confident, capable individuals who challenge traditional gender norms.

1. Role of Women Teachers as Catalysts

- **Primary education impact: Devi, B.(2012).** Mentioned that Women teachers play a vital role in the all round development of a child. In primary schools of Assam, there is least number of women teachers. They face various problems. To increase the number of women teachers in primary schools, importance should be given to overcome the problems of women teachers. It highlights their essential role in early childhood learning, documents challenges they face including low representation and proposes measures to overcome these barriers to enhance female participation and improve educational outcomes in the region.
- Lalrinhlui, & Sailo, V. (2023). This study was conducted to find out the attitude of secondary school teachers of Aizawl city towards women empowerment. The sample of the study comprised of 150 secondary school teachers and the findings of the study revealed that majority of the teachers i.e., 84.65% have positive attitude towards women empowerment. The findings also showed that educational qualifications and marital status did not have any role in determining attitude towards women empowerment of secondary school teachers. The type of school management, i.e., government, private and deficit did not have any role in determining the attitude of secondary school teachers towards women empowerment
- **Kothari Commission's insight:** Highlighting that “the destiny of the country is being shaped in the classroom and teachers hold the key position” underscores the influence of

educator attitudes on students' empowerment trajectories. Female teachers not only provide comfort and representation, they shape foundational learning experiences and aspirations for girls.

2. Persistence of Gender Gaps despite Progress

a) Empowerment still lagging: Multiple studies show that in Assam:

- Women remain underrepresented in government roles and political participation.
- Female enrollment rates remain below 50%, despite educational schemes like the Mid-Day Meal.
- There's significant district-level variation; literacy correlates with female workforce participation, but gender disparities endure.

From this Teachers' attitudes are a critical factor in bridging these gaps. Positive attitudes can help sustain girls' enrollment and empowerment; negative ones may undermine even well-intentioned policies.

Teachers' attitudes are crucial for modern education's role in women's empowerment, with research showing that supportive, inclusive attitudes from both male and female educators foster environments where girls feel empowered to pursue their goals and challenge norms. Positive teacher attitudes, encompassing empathy, inclusivity, and a collaborative approach, are key to creating inclusive classrooms and inspiring young girls to become agents of change.

Objectives 2: Analyze the Impact of Teachers' Attitudes on Women Students' Academic Performance and Motivation (Assam Context)

In Assam, Aditi Das (2024) highlights how gender stereotyping by teachers in rural classrooms can limit girls' engagement and academic performance, while Binita Devi (2012) underscores that the presence of female teachers fosters trust and motivates young girls demonstrating the dual impact of teacher identity and attitudes.

Scholars have long argued that teachers' attitudes significantly affect students' motivation and learning outcomes. Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) introduced the concept of the "Pygmalion effect," where teachers' expectations influence students' achievement. In the Assam context, Bordoloi (2012) highlights that female students' success in secondary schools is closely linked with teacher encouragement and support. Similarly, Gogoi (2015) found that in many Assamese rural schools, the lack of gender-sensitive teaching practices reduces girls' classroom participation and motivation. A district-level study in Dibrugarh by Saikia (2018) observed that academic achievement motivation among Class X students was directly

correlated with teachers' supportive attitudes, showing that female students performed better when they perceived teachers as approachable and encouraging. These findings suggest that teacher attitudes act as a catalyst for improving not only academic performance but also the confidence and aspiration of women students in Assam.

Objective 3: to examine the relationship between Teachers' Attitudes and Women Empowerment in Educational Settings

In Assam, the relationship between teachers' attitudes and women's empowerment in education is a significant area of study because teachers act as key change agents in shaping gender perceptions and guiding students' aspirations. Women's empowerment in education goes beyond enrollment; it depends on how teachers encourage, mentor, and provide equal opportunities to girls in classrooms. As Baruah (2013) notes, patriarchal values and cultural restrictions in Assam often limit girls' educational progress, but supportive teachers can challenge such barriers by motivating female students to continue higher studies. Similarly, Devi (2015) emphasizes that teacher' positive attitudes help build self-confidence among girls, particularly in rural and tribal areas where socio-cultural constraints are more pronounced.

Sharma and Das (2017) argue that empowerment involves self-reliance, participation, and decision-making abilities, which teachers can promote by creating inclusive and gender-sensitive learning environments. In Assam, where dropout rates among adolescent girls remain a concern (NSSO, 2019), teacher encouragement is directly linked to reducing early marriage and school withdrawal. Phukan (2020) highlights that when teachers promote awareness on issues such as menstrual health, safety, and equal classroom participation; they contribute significantly to women's empowerment.

Further, Borah and Gogoi (2021) observe that gender equity training for teachers in Assam enhances their sensitivity and translates into improved student outcomes, including higher aspirations and active participation in leadership roles. Thus, the relationship between teachers' attitudes and women's empowerment is reinforcing: empowered and gender-aware teachers nurture empowered learners. In the context of Assam, examining this relationship becomes crucial to understanding how teacher behavior, classroom practices, and institutional support can transform women's educational opportunities and contribute to broader goals of gender justice and socio-economic development.

Dutta (2019) reveals that girls in rural Assam have significantly lower awareness of empowerment compared to their urban peers, suggesting that teachers' attitudes in rural

schools may be a key missing link. Complementing this, Saikia (2020) shows that among tea-tribe communities, educational access for women is impeded by socio-economic constraints, which teachers must actively counteract. Moreover, Nayak & Mahanta's broader socio-economic analysis of Assam (2013/2025) indicates that women's limited autonomy and participation reflect systemic issues that teacher-student dynamics alone cannot resolve." Teachers not only transmit knowledge but also act as agents of social change. Sen (1999) in his capability approach emphasized that empowerment through education depends on the environment created by educators. In Assam, Das (2016) pointed out that teachers who maintain positive gender attitudes help female students develop decision-making abilities, self-confidence, and leadership qualities within school settings. Talukdar (2017) further demonstrated that in rural Assamese schools, women students' continuation to higher education was strongly influenced by the motivational role of teachers, who encouraged them to pursue studies despite socio-economic barriers. Baruah (2020) examined secondary schools in Upper Assam and argued that when teachers display gender-equitable attitudes, girls are more likely to challenge stereotypes and actively participate in school councils, debates, and leadership roles, which directly links to empowerment. Thus, the relationship between teacher attitudes and empowerment in Assam lies in the way educator's foster agency, aspiration, and equal opportunity for women learners.

Objective4 : To Identify Socio-Cultural and Institutional Barriers and Strategies for Promoting Positive Teachers' Attitudes and Women's Empowerment in Modern Education in Assam

Women's empowerment in education is shaped not only by teacher attitudes but also by the socio-cultural and institutional contexts in which schools function. Stromquist (2015) argued that patriarchal norms often influence teachers' behaviors, reproducing gender hierarchies within classrooms. In India, Nambissan (1999) showed that family expectations, early marriage, and domestic responsibilities restrict girls' education, indirectly shaping teachers' perceptions of female students.

In Assam, several studies have highlighted socio-cultural barriers. Gogoi, L (2015) observed that traditional gender norms in rural Assam often discourage girls from pursuing higher studies, which affects teacher motivation to invest in their future. Hazarika, N. (2018) added that community resistance and parental skepticism limit the effectiveness of even supportive teachers. Nath, S. (2021) emphasized that the lack of female role models in certain

regions perpetuates stereotypes, reducing both teachers' and students' belief in women's empowerment.

Institutional barriers also remain significant. Bhuyan, T. (2019) argued that teacher training programs in Assam rarely incorporate gender-sensitivity modules, leaving many teachers unaware of how to encourage female empowerment. Das, R. (2016) noted that resource constraints, poor infrastructure, and overcrowded classrooms further prevent teachers from engaging equally with boys and girls. Talukdar, P. (2017) also pointed out that weak policy implementation means government schemes for girls' education often fail without active teacher involvement.

Strategies suggested in literature include gender-sensitive teacher training (Unterhalter, 2012), mentorship programs led by female educators (Nath, S. 2021), and linking government schemes with teacher encouragement (Gogoi & Dutta, 2022). Stromquist (2015) emphasized integrating gender equity into pedagogy, while Baruah (2020) stressed extracurricular participation as a tool for empowerment.

Thus, in context of Assam addressing socio-cultural prejudices, strengthening teacher preparation, and ensuring institutional support are essential for transforming teachers' attitudes into agents of women's empowerment in modern education.

4. Findings

1. Teachers' attitudes are pivotal to women's empowerment:

Literature across Assam and broader India consistently shows that teachers' perceptions, expectations, and behaviors significantly shape girls' access, retention, and academic performance. Supportive teacher attitudes boost self-confidence, aspirations, and leadership opportunities for female students, while negative or stereotypical attitudes limit participation and motivation.

2. Persistent gender bias in classroom practices:

Studies (Das, 2024; Gogoi, 2015) reveal that many Assamese classrooms still reflect gender stereotyping, with boys often prioritized in science subjects, leadership roles, or classroom interactions. These practices contribute to enduring gender gaps in learning outcomes and career aspirations.

3. Female teachers as role models:

Research (Nath, 2021; Devi, 2012) highlights that female teachers inspire girls to pursue education and overcome social barriers. However, their representation in rural

and primary schools remains low, limiting their potential as catalysts of empowerment.

4. **Socio-cultural and institutional barriers:**

Patriarchal norms, early marriage, and household responsibilities continue to discourage girls from pursuing education. At the institutional level, inadequate gender training for teachers, poor infrastructure, and weak policy implementation hinder empowerment efforts.

5. **Need for gender-responsive teacher training:**

Many studies recommend targeted pre-service and in-service training to foster gender awareness among teachers. Practice-embedded approaches, mentorship programs, and linking government schemes with teacher encouragement emerge as effective strategies.

5. Conclusion

The review establishes that in Assam, teachers' attitudes form the crucial link between modern education and women's empowerment. While state-level policies and literacy growth have created opportunities, the classroom remains the decisive space where empowerment is either nurtured or constrained. Teachers who adopt inclusive, empathetic, and gender-sensitive approaches not only improve girls' academic outcomes but also cultivate their agency, self-confidence, and leadership skills. Conversely, gender bias in pedagogy perpetuates social inequities and weakens empowerment efforts.

The study concludes that achieving genuine women's empowerment in Assam requires a **multi-pronged approach**: (i) strengthening teacher training with gender equity modules, (ii) increasing the presence of female teachers, especially in rural schools, (iii) integrating community participation to counter socio-cultural resistance, and (iv) aligning policies such as NEP 2020 and Samagra Shiksha with classroom-level teacher practices.

Ultimately, teachers are not merely transmitters of knowledge but agents of social change. By reshaping attitudes and practices, educators can transform modern education in Assam into a powerful vehicle for achieving gender justice and empowering women to actively participate in socio-economic and cultural life.

Declarations

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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