

Academic Journey of Prospective Muslim Female Teachers

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Abstract

For the growth of a nation's economy, men and women are equally necessary. Within India the proportion of Muslim women in higher education and other employment sector is low. Muslim women are more illiterate than their male counterparts. The main goal of this research was to explore the constraints and related strategies used by the prospective Muslim female teachers. The sample of this study comprised female students enrolled in teacher education programme at College of Teacher Education, Bhopal (India). In this descriptive survey research, data was collected using a questionnaire developed by the researchers. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used in the analysis of data. The findings indicate that the educational attainment of prospective Muslim female teachers from rural area was low compared to urban areas. The major constraints they faced on their academic journey were- travel time or distance taken to school or college, lack of hostel facilities, social and gender stereotyping, economic crisis, and poor health, etc. Prospective Muslim female teachers followed the strategies such as the development of self-confidence, commitment to education, supports of family members and teachers, and adaptability, etc. Further, this paper also discusses the educational implications.

Keywords: Prospective Muslim female teachers, Academic Journey, MANUU.

1. Introduction

The National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986 states that “some minority groups are educationally deprived or backward. Greater attention will be paid to the education of these groups in the interest of equality and social justice” (MHRD, 1986). Muslims are the largest minority group in India, which is seriously lagging behind most of the human development indicators such as economic condition, education, unemployment etc. On poor educational status of Muslims, the Sachar Committee Report states:

“One-fourth of Muslim children in the age group of 6-14 years have either never attended school or are drop-outs. For children above the age of 17 years, the educational attainment of Muslim at matriculation is 17%, as against national average at 26%. Only 50% of Muslims who complete middle school are likely to complete secondary education, compare to 62% at national level.”

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Muslims are fairly low in literacy, reflecting from the 2011 Census Survey. 17.22 crore Muslims constitute 14.23% of total population in India. It showed that Muslims have a lowest literacy rate of 57.28%, among Jains, at 84.7%, followed by Christians 74.35%, Buddhists 71.8%, Sikhs 67.5% and Hindus 63.61% according to the 2011 Census. The report also highlighted the gender based literacy rate. Among the Muslim population, approx 48% of them are women. Muslim women are more illiterate (48.1%) than Muslim male (37.59%). The literacy rate among Muslim women is low. Muslim girls and women lag behind their male counterparts in every sphere of life.

After independence, several committees and commissions were set up in India, they highlighted the issues of women including their education. There were many reasons highlighted for the low literacy rate among Muslims women including lack of awareness among Muslim parents, a negative attitude towards girl's education, early marriage, an unsafe environment, and community resistance, etc. were major among them (Hussain, 1990; Hoque, 2016). Education is one of the most powerful tools for the empowerment of women. The empowerment of women viz. social, political, economic empowerment etc. is essential for the development of the nation.

The present research was conducted on prospective Muslim female teachers who came to Bhopal (India) travelling a long distance from various states of India. They were enrolled in teacher education programme of one of the constituent colleges of Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU). The University came into existence in 1998 by an Indian Act of Parliament, in Hyderabad (India) to promote and preserve one of the nation's cultural heritages i.e. it is Urdu language. MANUU imparts secular education to all people in the Urdu medium. To be enrolled in the teacher education programme, candidates have to appear in the entrance examination to be taken by the university. After qualifying the entrance test, colleges are allotted based on their ranking of merit. The Muslim girls travelled a long distance to higher education, which was a courageous and progressive step. Hence, the present research was conducted to study what problems came to the prospective Muslim female teachers in their educational journey and how they dealt with those problems.

2. Methodology

The sample of this study comprised twenty prospective Muslim female teachers, i.e. students enrolled in B.Ed programs, selected at random from a constituent teacher education college of Maulana Azad National Urdu University. All participants in this study were drawn from the College of Teacher Education (CTE), Bhopal (India). The CTE is one of the eight constituent teacher education colleges of Maulana Azad National Urdu University. The College was established in 2007 to meet the growing demand of Urdu medium teachers. The College offers three programmes in Teacher Education: Ph.D. in Education, Master of Education (M.Ed.) and Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.).

The average age of the prospective Muslim female teachers was 23.5 years. In this descriptive survey research, data was collected using a questionnaire developed by the researchers. The consent was sought from the participants prior to the administration of the

questionnaire. In fact, they were told not to reveal their identity if they did not wish to do so. The questionnaire was in Urdu language and consisted of two parts: the first part requested demographic information including gender, age, qualification, and residence etc. while the second part included open-ended questionnaire. Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were used in the analysis of data.

3. Demographic Context of Prospective Muslim Female Teachers

The demographic information of the participants is given below.

3.1. Marital status

Table 1. Marital status of the participants

Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Married	4	20
Unmarried	16	80

Out of the total participants, 20% percent of the participants were married, while 80% were unmarried.

3.2. Regional dimension

Analysis of the data revealed that most of the participants (80%) in this study were from Bihar. There were also participants from other Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

From Bihar the participants represented eight districts-Darbhangha, Patna, Samastipur, Katihar, Purnea, Champaran, Gopal gunj and Motihari. Most of the participants were from Darbhanga (45%) and Patna (10%) districts. The remaining six districts represented thirty percent of the participants, i.e. each district with 5% percent.

Table 2. Distribution of the participants region wise

Bihar		Uttar Pradesh		West Bengal	
District	Percent	District	Percent	District	Percent
Darbhangha	40	Amroha	5	Bardawan	5
Patna	10	Mao	10		
Samastipur, Katihar, Purnea, Champaran, Gopal gunj and Motihari	30				
Total	80		15		5

The participants from Uttar Pradesh came from two districts: Mao (5%) and Amroha (5%). Participants from Bardawan, a district in West Bengal was found to be low (5%).

The majority of the participants in this study were from urban areas as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of the participants area wise

Areas	Frequency	Percent
Rural	6	30
Urban	14	70

3.3. Educational qualification

The educational qualifications of the participants are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Educational qualification of the participants

Qualification	Frequency	Percent
B.A.	5	25
B.Sc.	7	35
B.Com.	1	5
M.A.	5	25
M.Sc.	2	10

The analysis showed that prospective Muslim female teachers were from different streams. Approximately, 50 percent of the participants were from the Arts, 45 percent from the science stream, and 5 percent from the commerce stream, respectively. Further analysis showed that none of the rural participants were postgraduates.

3.4. Schooling

Most Muslim prospective female teachers obtained their primary education from a government or private schools. Just 10 percent of participants obtained primary education from Maktab/Madarsa. After reaching secondary and higher secondary education, several girls left private schools and Madarsa, enrolled in government school as indicated by the rise in the percentage shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Schooling of the participants

Institute/School	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Higher Secondary Education
	Percent	Percent	Percent
Maktab/Madarsa	10	5	5
Govt. School	55	80	85
Private School	35	15	10

All participants reported that they completed their schooling and college in regular mode.

3.5. Educational Qualification of the Parents

Qualification of mother of the participants

The analysis showed that qualification of the mother of the participants; about 40 percent were non-matric or home-educated, 30 percent were qualified matriculation (Class X), 10

percent completed Class XII or equivalent, 5 percent were graduates and 5 percent was post-graduates respectively. The remaining 10% of participants did not mention their mother's qualifications.

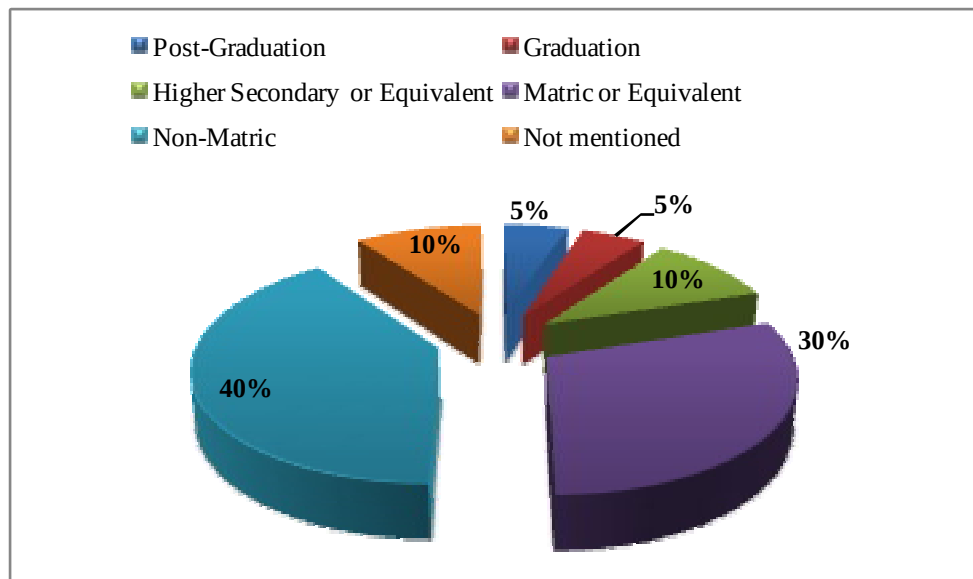


Fig 1(a): Qualification of Mother of the participants (N=20)

It would be interesting to compare the mother's qualifications of prospective Muslim female teachers in rural and urban areas. The analysis showed that the mother from the urban areas of the participants was more educationally forward than her counterpart in rural areas, as shown in Fig. 1(b). None of the mothers of the participants were graduate or post-graduate from rural areas.

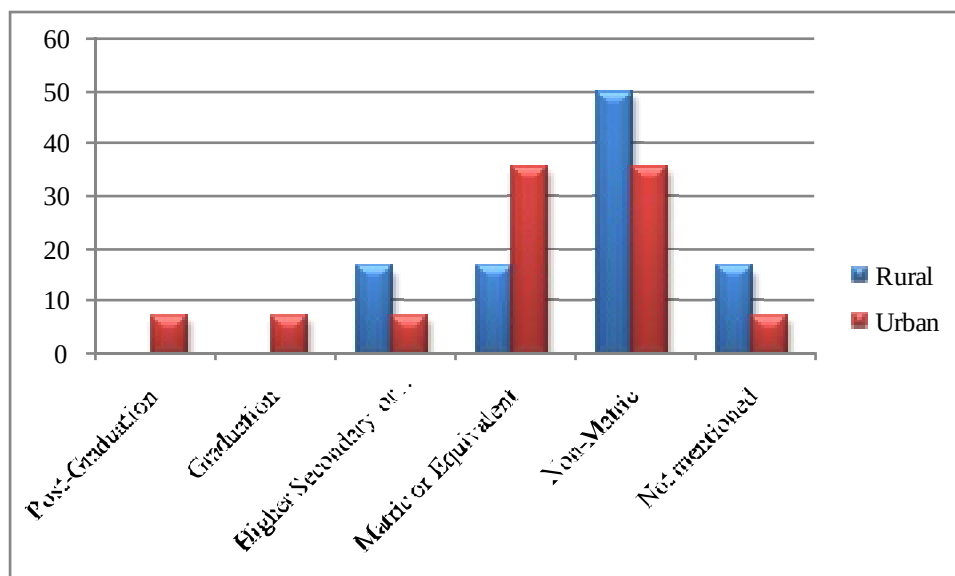


Fig 1(b): Qualification of Mother of the participants (in percent)

Qualification of father of the participants

Similar to the qualification of mother, the analysis revealed that 40 percent of the participant's father was non-matric or received home education, 30 percent qualified matriculation (Class X), 10 percent completed Class XII or equivalent, 5 percent of them were graduates and remaining 5 percent was post-graduate respectively. The remaining 10% of the participants did not mention the qualification of their father.

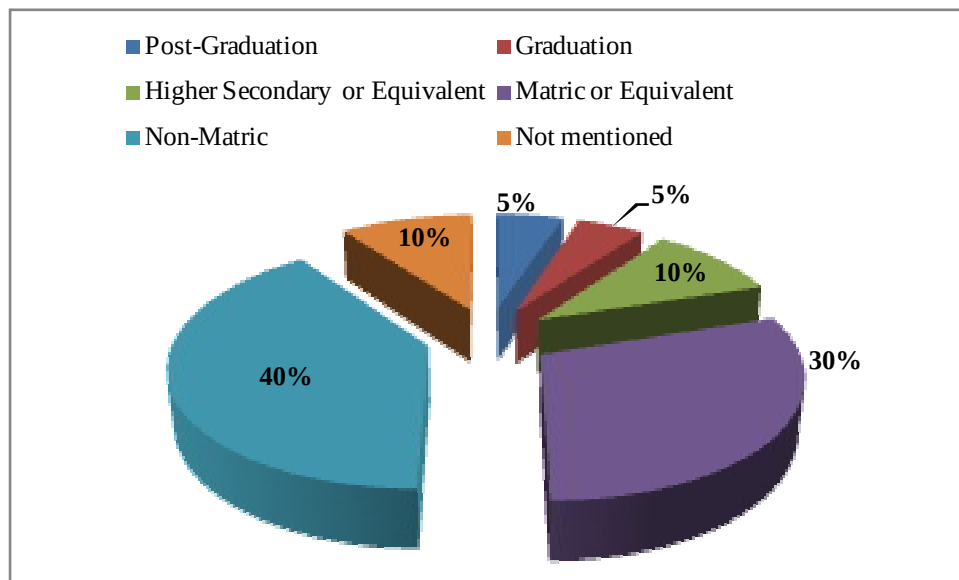


Fig 2(a): Educational qualification of Father of the participants

Further analysis of data showed that the qualification of the father of urban and rural participants was almost the same as shown in Fig 2(b). Nevertheless, there was no post-graduate father of rural participants.

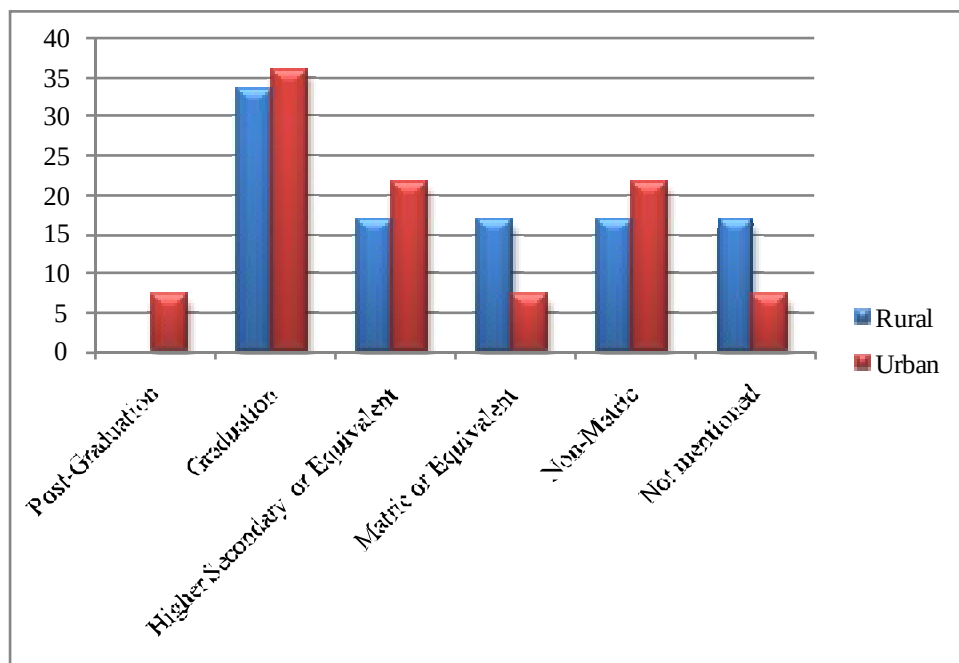


Fig 2(b): Qualification of Father of the participants (in percent)

To sum up, the mother of urban participants was more educationally forward than the mother of rural participants. This trend indicates the education of Muslim women living in rural and urban areas. Although this pattern might not be consistent, depending on many other factors, such as socioeconomic factors, region and locations, etc.

4. Challenges in Academic Journey of Prospective Muslim Female Teachers

The prospective Muslim female teachers experienced a number of difficulties on their academic journey, as revealed by their answers to the question, “What challenges/problems did you face to reach at this level in your educational journey that began from school?” The problems identified by the analysis of data were as follows.

4.1. Long Distance of School and College from Home

Upon analyzing the data obtained, 50 percent of the participants reported that the long distance of school and college from their home was a major problem on their academic journey. As some of the respondents said:

“School was far away from my home, I had to go on foot so become tired.”

“The college was 4 km away; the way was on foot.”

“I used to travel 25 km from my home to school.”

“I often had to stay away from home due to long-distance of the college.”

“When I qualified entrance of graduation then my parents and family members became worried over how I could go to college because it was very far away.”

It can be inferred from the analysed data that one of the major problems for prospective Muslim female teachers for education was the long distance of school and college from their home.

4.2. Stereotyped Mindset of People

Analysis of the data revealed that 20 percent of participants stated that they had to encounter a few taunts in society due to the stereotyped mindset of the people living in the society. Some of their verbatim were as follows.

“(…) what will the girl child do after studying (…)?”

“(…) the uneducated people around, they taunted [on us].”

“Some of the local used to laugh that he [my dad] sends daughters too far to study.”

It can be inferred from their responses that the stereotypical thinking of Muslim individuals in society was one of the constraints on their education.

4.3. Economic Crisis

Analysis of data showed that 20 percent of the participants attributed economic problems as one of the obstacles on their academic path, even though they have passed certain barriers. A few responses were as follows:

“.. I am a labourer’s daughter. My parents have been in this situation...I had to face a lot of difficulties.”

“The financial condition was not good, it was a challenge to get education.”

“My father is a farmer...income is not much, yet he taught me”

The analysis revealed that the poor economic conditions of Muslim parents, particularly in rural areas, were the problems for Muslim women education.

4.4. Other Constraints

In addition, 10% of the participants mentioned some other challenges, such as health, marriage, choice of streams, lack of hostels, and security concerns, etc. Some of their responses were as follows:

“After passing 12th, I was ...[asked] to get marry (...), my dad accepted my opposition.”

“I decided to become a doctor (...) according to my father’s wish, I chose a teaching profession and joined B. Ed.”

“(...) many ups and downs in my life... health issue was one of them”.

“The lack of hostels facility in the college campus was a big challenge for me”

“In relation to safety, my family was concerned about how I can stay out for education (...).”

The lack of infrastructure, including hostel facilities, is a problem for women’s safety and is related to women’s education. In a patriarchal Muslim society, women are seldom free to make decisions themselves on most of the issues in their lives. As the data shows, the participants wanted to choose the science stream at the higher secondary level of schooling, but parents forced them to settle for the arts and become a teacher. The other issues related to some of the participants were poor health conditions and early marriage. In short, prospective Muslim female teachers faced a number of difficulties on their academic journey including long distance from school and college, stereotyped mindset of people, economic crisis, early marriage, and health issues, etc.

5. Ways to Overcome the Problems

Another objective of the study was to study how these Muslim prospective female teachers faced the problems that came on their academic journey. Following qualitative analysis of the

data, the strategies emerged were: self-confidence, commitment to education, supports of family members, and adaptability, etc.

5.1. Self-confidence

Upon analyzing the data obtained from the participants, it was observed that their self-confidence played a key role in overcoming the difficulties. Approximately, 70 percent of the participants pointed out that self-confidence was the best tool in their academic journey to tackle the problems. One of the respondents stated:

“(...) fought against every challenge so that the younger sister would not face any problems like me.”

Others wrote, “(...) consider every problem as a challenge (...) faced difficulties.”

Some responses were as follows:

“Wherever I am, my home is there, and I strengthened myself (...).”

“I prepared myself to fight against problems like (...).”

It can be inferred from the responses that their self-confidence has made them strong to overcome the problems that have emerged on the way of the academic journey.

5.2. Commitment to Education

About 50 percent of the participants stated that their intense will power guided them to higher education. Some of the respondents said:

“I work hard. I want to create an educated society (...).”

“I’ve always fought for my studies.”

“(...) I’ve been very fond of reading.”

“(...) moved forward by being self-reliant and focused on my goal with hard work.”

5.3. Support of family and teachers

About 25% of the participants stated that the support of family members and teachers was essential to the difficulties they faced. They stated:

“(...) father and family supported me ... younger brother cooperated me (...).”

“(...) for making the academic journey a success, credit goes to my maternal grandparents and to my dad.”

“(...) it was the biggest challenge for me leaving my young daughter far away from me.”

“Parents never paid attention to people’s nonsense”

“(…), teacher encouraged me.”

The co-operation of parents, teachers and family members was essential and helped them to overcome the problems the prospective Muslim female teacher faced.

5.4. Adaptability

After analyzing the data received, it was found that 20 percent of the participants stated that they used adaptability as a means to face the problems. They adapted themselves according to their environment. As they said:

“(…) adapted myself according to the environment.”

“(…) the economic condition was not good ... used available resources economically.”

5.5. Other measures

Approximately, 10 percent of participants preferred many alternatives to address economic challenges. They played the role of tutor, took part in the work of sewing embroidery, etc. As a few of the participants stated:

“The economic condition was not so good, taught tuition.”

“(…) assisted sister-in-law in her sewing work.”

To sum up, the Muslim prospective female teachers used many strategies to overcome the problems that came on the way of the academic journey. Among them-self-confidence, determination, supports of family members, adaptability and other alternatives were important.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the educational attainment of prospective Muslim female teachers from a rural areas was low compared to urban areas. In a patriarchal Muslim society, women have never been free to make decisions about most of the issues in their lives. As can be seen from the findings that at the higher secondary level, many participants decided to choose a science stream, but parents forced them to choose humanities. From the analyzed data, it can be concluded that one of the major issues for prospective Muslim female teachers was the long distance of school and college from home. The other concern with the participants was poor health. On the importance of women health, Shazia Naseer (2009) stated: “Women are the foundation upon which the family and society are built. Their bodies are the bed rock that supports civilization. Just as the foundation of a house must be perfectly strong, women bodies and their health should be perfectly balanced (p. 52)”. In short, prospective Muslim female teachers faced a number of difficulties on their academic journey. The major constraints were- travel time taken to school or college, lack of hostel facilities, social and gender stereotyping, economic crisis, and poor health. The prospective Muslim female

teaches followed the strategies such as the development of self-confidence, commitment to education, supports of family members and teachers, and adaptability, etc.

From the findings, it can be suggested that the opportunity to gain self-confidence, communication and leadership skills should be given to women in general and to Muslim women in particular in order to face up to the constraints on the way of their academic journey. There is a need for general awareness for modern education, rights, equality and privilege of women in Muslim community. The stereotyped view of individuals in society needs to be changed. The number of schools, colleges and higher educational institutions should be increased. Hence, there is a need to increase public funding “to higher and technical education as these institutions are not only inadequate but also declining...”(Prakash, 2007, p.3258). The present studies have a number of limitations such as small sample size etc. Nevertheless, the results provide some insights about the academic journey of prospective Muslim female teachers.

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