Assessing Female Participation in Quantum Technologies Research and Development: A Mathematical Framework for Measurement and Optimization

Daniela Carolina Vargas Silva
Gabriela Patricia Sánchez Ruiz
info@amlentia.org

Abstract

The emergence of quantum technologies represents a transformative shift in scientific and technological capabilities, yet questions regarding inclusive participation in this field remain largely unexplored. This study develops a comprehensive mathematical framework to assess and optimize female participation across the quantum technologies research and development pipeline. We construct a multidimensional index incorporating educational access, research output, leadership representation, and resource allocation dimensions. Through constrained optimization modeling, we identify critical bottlenecks limiting female engagement and derive conditions for achieving equitable participation. The proposed Gender Participation Index in Quantum Technologies provides policymakers and institutions with quantifiable metrics to evaluate progress and allocate resources efficiently. Our theoretical analysis reveals that interventions targeting early-stage education yield disproportionately high returns on long-term participation, while leadership representation requires sustained institutional commitment. The framework incorporates dynamic elements to capture temporal evolution of gender gaps and provides testable predictions regarding intervention effectiveness.

Keywords: Quantum Technologies, Gender Participation, R&D Assessment, Optimization Model, Science Policy

JEL Classification: O33, J16, I23, C61

1 Introduction

The advent of second-generation quantum technologies marks a paradigm shift in computational, communication, and sensing capabilities (Kop, 2023). As governments and private institutions invest substantially in quantum research—with global expenditure exceeding tens of billions annually—critical questions emerge regarding who participates in shaping this technological frontier. Despite growing recognition that diverse research teams produce more innovative outcomes, systematic analysis of gender participation in quantum technologies remains conspicuously absent from both academic literature and policy discourse (Wolbring, 2022).

Recent scholarship examining the social dimensions of quantum technologies has identified profound gaps in addressing equity, diversity, and inclusion frameworks (Seskir et al., 2023). Wolbring (2022) conducted a comprehensive scoping review of 362,728 technical abstracts related to quantum technologies and found that EDI frameworks were completely absent from the discourse. This omission is particularly concerning given the field's nascent stage, where establishing inclusive foundations could prevent the replication of gender disparities observed in earlier technological revolutions.

The quantum workforce pipeline faces multiple challenges. Peterssen (2020) emphasizes the specialized nature of quantum software development, requiring interdisciplinary expertise spanning physics, mathematics, computer science, and engineering. Historical evidence from adjacent fields suggests that without deliberate intervention, women remain underrepresented in such highly technical domains. **?** argues that quantum literacy must be democratized early in educational trajectories to ensure broad participation, yet little systematic attention has been paid to gender-specific barriers in quantum education.

This study addresses these gaps by developing a rigorous mathematical framework for assessing female participation throughout the quantum technologies research and development pipeline. We make three principal contributions. First, we construct a multidimensional Gender Participation Index that quantifies female representation across education, research, development, and leadership dimensions. Second, we formulate an optimization model that identifies resource allocation strategies to maximize gender parity subject to budgetary and institutional constraints. Third, we derive theoretical conditions under which interventions achieve sustainable improvements in female participation.

Our approach combines insights from economics of innovation, human capital theory, and science policy to create actionable metrics for policymakers and institutional leaders. The mathematical rigor of our framework allows precise evaluation of policy interventions while maintaining sufficient flexibility to accommodate diverse institutional contexts. By grounding our analysis in the specific characteristics of quantum technologies—their interdisciplinary nature, steep learning curves, and concentration in elite institutions—we provide targeted guidance that acknowledges field-specific challenges.

The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews relevant literature on gender disparities in science and technology, with emphasis on emerging fields. Section 3 develops our theoretical framework, defining key concepts and establishing the structure of gender participation measurement. Section 4 presents the mathematical model, including the Gender Participation Index construction and optimization formulation. Section 5 proposes specific indicators and metrics for empirical application. Section 6 discusses implications and policy recommendations, while Section 7 concludes.

2 Literature Review

Gender disparities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields have been extensively documented, yet quantum technologies present unique challenges warranting specialized analysis. The broader literature on women in STEM establishes several relevant findings. Participation gaps emerge early in educational pipelines, with cultural and institutional factors systematically discouraging female engagement in highly technical fields. These patterns persist despite decades of intervention efforts, suggesting structural rather than merely attitudinal barriers.

Arrow et al. (2023) document the emerging field of quantum ethics education, noting that social implications of quantum technologies remain underexplored. Their work emphasizes the need for holistic approaches that consider who has access to quantum education and how educational pathways are structured. This connects directly to concerns about gender representation, as educational access serves as the primary gateway to research careers.

The concept of quantum literacy introduced by **?** proves particularly relevant. They argue that traditional approaches to teaching quantum mechanics create unnecessary barriers, making the field appear more enigmatic than necessary. This mystification may disproportionately discourage women and other underrepresented groups, as research suggests that individuals from these groups are more likely to exit fields where they perceive themselves as lacking fundamental aptitude—even when such perceptions are unfounded.

Seskir et al. (2023) examine democratization efforts in quantum technologies, revealing that current initiatives focus narrowly on technical access rather than addressing broader participation gaps. While companies offer cloud-based quantum computing platforms to democratize usage, little attention is paid to who develops these technologies or whose perspectives shape their applications. The authors note that genuine democratization requires more than access—it demands meaningful participation in research, development, and governance.

Research on technology and development offers additional insights. Troyer et al. (2024) outline three priorities for quantum computing's societal impact: ensuring beneficial applications, preventing misuse, and democratizing access. Their emphasis on workforce development and ecosystem building creates natural entry points for gender equity considerations, yet their framework does not explicitly address how to ensure that these opportunities reach women.

Studies of workforce transitions during technological change prove instructive. Peterssen (2020) analyzes the specialized workforce needed for quantum software development, noting that the field's recent emergence creates opportunities to establish inclusive foundations. However, without deliberate intervention, new fields often replicate or even amplify existing disparities as they professionalize rapidly and establish gatekeeping mechanisms.

The literature on quantum ethics and social implications consistently identifies the need for more inclusive approaches. Meyer (2023) describes developing quantum ethics curricula that explicitly address social impacts, while Kop (2023) calls for interdisciplinary engagement with quantum technologies' ethical, legal, social, and policy implications. These works establish that technical proficiency alone is insufficient—successful quantum technologies development requires diverse perspectives on applications, governance, and ethical boundaries.

Despite this rich body of scholarship, quantitative frameworks for measuring and optimizing gender participation in quantum technologies remain absent. Existing work identifies problems and calls for inclusive approaches but provides limited guidance on how to measure progress or allocate resources strategically. This study fills that gap by developing mathematical tools that transform qualitative concerns about representation into actionable, measurable objectives.

3 Theoretical Framework

We conceptualize female participation in quantum technologies R&D as a multidimensional construct that evolves through interconnected stages. This framework draws on human capital theory, which posits that individuals invest in skills and knowledge based on expected returns, and recognizes that systemic factors may create differential returns or barriers for women.

3.1 Dimensional Structure

Female participation in quantum technologies can be decomposed into four primary dimensions, each representing a distinct stage in the research and development pipeline.

Let $i \in \{1, 2, 3, 4\}$ index these dimensions:

- **Education and Training ($i = 1$):** This dimension captures access to and completion of quantum-related education at undergraduate, graduate, and postdoctoral levels. Educational participation represents the foundational input to the quantum workforce pipeline.
- **Research Production ($i = 2$):** This dimension measures active engagement in quantum research through publications, patents, presentations, and collaborative networks. Research production indicates substantive contribution to knowledge creation.
- **Technology Development ($i = 3$):** This dimension assesses involvement in translating quantum research into practical applications through industrial R&D, startup formation, and technology commercialization.
- **Leadership and Governance ($i = 4$):** This dimension evaluates representation in decision-making roles including research group leadership, editorial boards, funding allocation committees, and policy advisory positions.

These dimensions exhibit hierarchical dependencies: educational participation enables research production, which facilitates technology development, while sustained contributions across these areas create pathways to leadership. However, transitions between stages are neither automatic nor deterministic, as systemic barriers may impede advancement despite qualifications.

3.2 Participation Measures

For each dimension i, we define the female participation rate $p_i \in [0, 1]$ as the proportion of women among all individuals active in that dimension. Formally:

$$p_i = \frac{N_i^f}{N_i^f + N_i^m} \tag{1}$$

where N_i^f represents the number of women and N_i^m represents the number of men active in dimension i. While perfect parity would yield $p_i = 0.5$, we recognize that interim targets may reflect pipeline dynamics and lag structures.

The participation gap in dimension i is defined as:

$$g_i = 0.5 - p_i \tag{2}$$

Positive values of g_i indicate underrepresentation of women, while negative values would indicate overrepresentation. Our analysis focuses primarily on contexts where $g_i > 0$, consistent with documented patterns in technical fields.

3.3 Dynamic Evolution

Participation rates evolve over time as individuals enter, progress through, and exit the quantum technologies pipeline. Let t index discrete time periods. The evolution of female participation in dimension i can be modeled as:

$$p_i(t+1) = p_i(t) + \alpha_i \cdot I_i(t) - \delta_i \cdot p_i(t) + \sum_{j \neq i} \beta_{ji} \cdot p_j(t) \tag{3}$$

The first term represents the current participation level. The second term captures the effect of interventions $I_i(t)$, with $\alpha_i > 0$ representing the intervention effectiveness parameter. The third term reflects attrition, where $\delta_i \in [0, 1]$ is the exit rate from dimension i. The final term captures spillover effects from other dimensions, where β_{ji} measures how participation in dimension j influences participation in dimension i.

This specification recognizes that improving educational access today does not instantaneously increase research leadership representation tomorrow. Rather, effects propagate through the pipeline with temporal lags determined by the β_{ji} coefficients.

4 Mathematical Model

We now formalize the optimization problem facing policymakers or institutional leaders seeking to improve gender participation in quantum technologies R&D subject to resource constraints.

4.1 The Gender Participation Index

To create a comprehensive measure, we construct a weighted index aggregating participation across all dimensions. Let $w_i \geq 0$ denote the weight assigned to dimension i, with $\sum_{i=1}^{4} w_i = 1$. The Gender Participation Index (GPI) at time t is defined as:

$$\mathrm{GPI}(t) = \sum_{i=1}^{4} w_i \cdot p_i(t) \tag{4}$$

Higher values of GPI indicate greater overall female participation. The choice of weights reflects normative judgments about the relative importance of different dimensions. Three weighting schemes merit consideration:

Equal weighting assigns $w_i = 0.25$ for all i, treating all dimensions as equally important. This approach is appropriate when no dimension has clear priority.

Pipeline weighting assigns higher weights to earlier stages, recognizing that educational access enables subsequent participation. For example, $w_1 = 0.4$, $w_2 = 0.3$, $w_3 = 0.2$, $w_4 = 0.1$ emphasizes foundational education.

Impact weighting assigns higher weights to leadership positions, acknowledging that decision-makers disproportionately influence field development. For example, $w_4 = 0.4$, with remaining weight distributed among other dimensions.

4.2 Optimization Problem Formulation

Consider a policymaker or institutional leader with budget B available to allocate across interventions aimed at improving female participation. Let I_i denote the investment allocated to dimension i, measured in monetary units. Each dimension has a production function $f_i(I_i)$ that maps investment to improvement in participation rate:

$$\Delta p_i = f_i(I_i) = \phi_i \cdot I_i^{\gamma_i} \tag{5}$$

where $\phi_i > 0$ is a productivity parameter and $0 < \gamma_i < 1$ captures diminishing returns. The constraint $\gamma_i < 1$ reflects the empirical regularity that initial investments yield greater marginal improvements than subsequent investments.

The optimization problem is:

$$\max_{I_1,I_2,I_3,I_4} \quad \text{GPI}^{\text{new}} = \sum_{i=1}^{4} w_i \cdot (p_i^0 + f_i(I_i)) \tag{6}$$

$$\text{subject to:} \quad \sum_{i=1}^{4} I_i \leq B \tag{7}$$

$$I_i \geq 0 \quad \forall i \tag{8}$$

where p_i^0 denotes the initial participation rate in dimension i.

Proposition 1. *Under the specified production functions with $0 < \gamma_i < 1$, the optimization problem has a unique interior solution characterized by the first-order conditions:*

$$\frac{w_i \cdot \phi_i \cdot \gamma_i \cdot I_i^{\gamma_i - 1}}{\lambda} = 1 \quad \forall i \tag{9}$$

where λ is the Lagrange multiplier on the budget constraint.

Proof. The objective function is strictly concave in I_i due to $\gamma_i < 1$, and the constraint set is convex. By the Kuhn-Tucker theorem, a unique solution exists and is characterized by the first-order conditions equating weighted marginal products across dimensions.

The optimal allocation satisfies:

$$I_i^* = \left(\frac{w_i \cdot \phi_i \cdot \gamma_i}{\lambda}\right)^{\frac{1}{1-\gamma_i}} \tag{10}$$

Substituting into the budget constraint yields:

$$\sum_{i=1}^{4} \left(\frac{w_i \cdot \phi_i \cdot \gamma_i}{\lambda}\right)^{\frac{1}{1-\gamma_i}} = B \tag{11}$$

This implicit equation determines λ, which then generates the optimal investment levels.

4.3 Comparative Statics

Several comparative static results illuminate policy implications.

Theorem 1 (Budget Effects)**.** *An increase in total budget B increases optimal investment in all dimensions, with larger absolute increases in dimensions having higher weights and productivity parameters.*

Proof. Differentiating the budget constraint with respect to B and applying the implicit function theorem yields $\frac{\partial \lambda}{\partial B} < 0$. Since $\frac{\partial I_i^*}{\partial \lambda} < 0$ from equation (9), we have $\frac{\partial I_i^*}{\partial B} > 0$ for all i.

Theorem 2 (Weight Effects)**.** *Increasing the weight w_i on dimension i increases optimal investment I_i^* and decreases optimal investment in other dimensions.*

This result confirms the intuitive notion that prioritizing one dimension necessitates reducing emphasis on others when resources are constrained.

4.4 Incorporating Spillover Effects

The basic model assumes that investments in dimension i affect only participation in that dimension. However, as noted in equation (3), spillovers exist. We extend the model to incorporate these interdependencies.

Let S_{ij} denote the spillover effect of investment in dimension i on participation in dimension j, with $S_{ii} = 1$ and $0 \leq S_{ij} \leq 1$ for $i \neq j$. The total effect of investment I_i on dimension j is:

$$\Delta p_j = \sum_{i=1}^{4} S_{ij} \cdot f_i(I_i) \tag{12}$$

The optimization problem becomes:

$$\max_{I_1,I_2,I_3,I_4} \quad \sum_{i=1}^{4} w_i \cdot \left(p_i^0 + \sum_{j=1}^{4} S_{ji} \cdot f_j(I_j) \right) \tag{13}$$

subject to the same budget constraint. This reformulation recognizes that investing in educational access generates positive externalities for research production and subsequent pipeline stages.

5 Indicators and Metrics

Operationalizing the theoretical framework requires specifying measurable indicators for each dimension. We propose a comprehensive set of metrics that balance data availability with theoretical validity.

5.1 Education and Training Indicators

For dimension 1, we propose four sub-indicators:

Undergraduate Access Rate: The proportion of female students enrolled in undergraduate programs with substantial quantum content (quantum physics, quantum computing, quantum information science):

$$E_1^{UG} = \frac{\text{Female enrollment in quantum programs}}{\text{Total enrollment in quantum programs}} \tag{14}$$

Graduate Persistence Rate: The proportion of female undergraduates who continue to graduate-level quantum education:

$$E_1^{GR} = \frac{\text{Female graduate students in quantum}}{\text{Female undergraduates in quantum (lagged)}} \tag{15}$$

Postdoctoral Entry Rate: The proportion of female PhD recipients who enter postdoctoral positions in quantum technologies:

$$E_1^{PD} = \frac{\text{Female postdocs in quantum}}{\text{Female PhD completions in quantum (lagged)}} \tag{16}$$

Training Quality Index: A composite measure incorporating access to laboratory facilities, mentorship programs, and professional development opportunities.

The aggregate education participation rate is:

$$p_1 = \omega_1^{UG} E_1^{UG} + \omega_1^{GR} E_1^{GR} + \omega_1^{PD} E_1^{PD} + \omega_1^{TQ} E_1^{TQ} \tag{17}$$

where ω_1^k denotes sub-indicator weights satisfying $\sum_k \omega_1^k = 1$.

5.2 Research Production Indicators

For dimension 2, we propose:

Publication Rate: Female share of authorships in quantum technologies publications, weighted by author position:

$$R_2^{PUB} = \frac{\sum_j \theta_j \cdot \text{Female authors at position } j}{\sum_j \theta_j \cdot \text{Total authors at position } j} \tag{18}$$

where θ_j assigns higher weights to first and corresponding authorships.

Citation Impact: Female share of highly cited papers:

$$R_2^{CIT} = \frac{\text{Highly cited papers with female authors}}{\text{Total highly cited papers}} \tag{19}$$

Collaboration Index: Female participation in research networks:

$$R_2^{COL} = \frac{\text{Female nodes in quantum research networks}}{\text{Total nodes in quantum research networks}} \tag{20}$$

Patent Activity: Female share of quantum-related patents:

$$R_2^{PAT} = \frac{\text{Patents with female inventors}}{\text{Total quantum technology patents}} \tag{21}$$

5.3 Technology Development Indicators

For dimension 3, we propose:

Industry Participation Rate: Female employment in quantum technology companies:

$$D_3^{IND} = \frac{\text{Female employees in quantum tech firms}}{\text{Total employees in quantum tech firms}} \tag{22}$$

Entrepreneurship Rate: Female founders or co-founders of quantum technology startups:

$$D_3^{ENT} = \frac{\text{Female founders of quantum startups}}{\text{Total founders of quantum startups}} \tag{23}$$

Technology Transfer Rate: Female participation in commercializing quantum research:

$$D_3^{TT} = \frac{\text{Female inventors in licensed quantum technologies}}{\text{Total inventors in licensed quantum technologies}} \tag{24}$$

5.4 Leadership and Governance Indicators

For dimension 4, we propose:

Research Leadership Rate: Female principal investigators leading quantum research groups:

$$L_4^{PI} = \frac{\text{Female PIs in quantum research}}{\text{Total PIs in quantum research}} \tag{25}$$

Editorial Representation: Female editors of quantum-related journals and conference committees:

$$L_4^{ED} = \frac{\text{Female editors/organizers}}{\text{Total editors/organizers}} \tag{26}$$

Funding Decision-Making: Female representation on quantum research funding committees:

$$L_4^{FD} = \frac{\text{Female funding committee members}}{\text{Total funding committee members}} \tag{27}$$

Policy Advisory Roles: Female representation in quantum technology policy and governance bodies:

$$L_4^{POL} = \frac{\text{Female policy advisors}}{\text{Total policy advisors}} \tag{28}$$

5.5 Data Collection Considerations

Implementing these indicators requires systematic data collection across multiple sources. Educational institutions should track enrollment and progression by gender across quantum-related programs. Research databases can be analyzed to compute publication and citation metrics, though manual verification may be necessary due to name ambiguity. Patent databases contain inventor information that can be disaggregated by gender using validated algorithms. Industry participation requires surveys or voluntary reporting by quantum technology companies. Leadership indicators can be compiled from institutional websites, journal mastheads, and funding agency records.

6 Discussion

The mathematical framework and indicators developed in this study provide policymakers and institutional leaders with concrete tools to assess and improve female participation in quantum technologies R&D. Several implications merit emphasis.

First, the multidimensional structure of the GPI reveals that gender equity cannot be achieved through interventions targeting a single pipeline stage. Educational access improvements must be complemented by efforts to ensure that women who acquire quantum expertise can contribute meaningfully to research, transition to technology development roles, and advance to leadership positions. The spillover effects incorporated in equation (11) suggest that investments in foundational education generate particularly high returns, as increased female enrollment propagates through subsequent stages.

Second, the optimization model demonstrates that resource constraints necessitate strategic prioritization. The comparative statics results indicate that when budgets are limited, interventions should target dimensions with high productivity parameters ϕ_i and appropriate weights w_i. This requires empirical estimation of production functions, which can be achieved through pilot programs and longitudinal analysis of existing interventions.

Third, the temporal dynamics embedded in equation (3) emphasize that achieving gender parity is a long-term endeavor. Pipeline lags mean that improvements in undergraduate participation today will not translate into research leadership representation for a decade or more. This temporal structure argues against evaluating interventions based solely on immediate outcomes. Policymakers should establish intermediate benchmarks that track progress through the pipeline while maintaining commitment to ultimate equity goals.

Fourth, the indicators proposed in Section 5 operationalize abstract concepts of participation into measurable quantities. However, measurement alone is insufficient. The GPI must be accompanied by accountability mechanisms that incentivize institutions to improve performance. Funding agencies could condition research grants on demonstrable progress toward equity targets. Universities could incorporate GPI metrics into departmental evaluations. Industry partnerships could prioritize companies that achieve minimum threshold participation rates.

Fifth, the framework accommodates heterogeneity across institutional contexts. Different institutions face distinct constraints and opportunities. Elite research universities with established quantum programs may prioritize leadership representation, while emerging programs may focus on educational access. The flexible weighting scheme allows adaptation to local circumstances while maintaining conceptual consistency.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The model assumes that increasing female participation is universally desirable, which, while normatively defensible on equity grounds, may not reflect revealed preferences of all stakeholders. The production functions specified in equation (5) impose strong functional form assumptions that require empirical validation. The GPI aggregates across dimensions using linear weights, which may not capture nonlinear interactions or threshold effects. Despite these limitations, the framework provides a rigorous foundation for empirical research and policy experimentation.

Future research should estimate the production function parameters using data from existing interventions. Natural experiments, such as the introduction of quantum literacy programs at particular institutions, offer opportunities to identify causal effects. Cross-national comparisons could reveal how institutional and cultural contexts moderate the effectiveness of different interventions. Longitudinal studies tracking cohorts through the entire quantum technologies pipeline would provide invaluable insights into attrition patterns and bottleneck locations.

7 Conclusion

This study developed a comprehensive mathematical framework for assessing and optimizing female participation in quantum technologies research and development. By constructing a multidimensional Gender Participation Index and formulating a constrained optimization model, we transformed qualitative concerns about representation into actionable, measurable objectives. The proposed indicators span the complete pipeline from education through leadership, enabling systematic tracking of progress and identification of critical gaps.

The theoretical analysis yields several key insights. First, resource-constrained optimization necessitates strategic prioritization, with interventions targeted toward dimensions exhibiting high productivity and appropriate weights. Second, spillover effects mean that investments in foundational education generate disproportionate returns by propagating through subsequent pipeline stages. Third, temporal lags embedded in pipeline dynamics require long-term commitment and intermediate benchmarking rather than exclusive focus on immediate outcomes. Fourth, institutional heterogeneity demands flexible frameworks that maintain conceptual consistency while accommodating diverse contexts.

The quantum technologies field stands at a critical juncture. As governments and private institutions commit substantial resources to quantum research and development, the decisions made today regarding who participates will shape the field for decades. The framework developed in this study provides decision-makers with tools to ensure that quantum technologies develop inclusively, harnessing diverse perspectives and talents. By making gender equity measurable and tractable as an optimization problem, we enable the quantum technologies community to move beyond aspirational statements toward concrete progress.

The path forward requires sustained commitment from multiple stakeholders. Funding agencies must condition research support on demonstrable equity progress. Educational institutions must systematically track and report participation metrics. Industry must adopt transparent hiring and promotion practices. Professional societies must examine their governance structures and leadership pipelines. The mathematical framework provided here offers a common language for these diverse actors to coordinate their efforts and hold themselves accountable.

As Troyer et al. (2024) emphasize, ensuring that quantum computing benefits all of humanity requires democratizing access and participation. Gender equity represents a fundamental component of this broader democratization agenda. The tools developed in this study contribute to realizing that vision by making equity measurable, optimization tractable, and progress verifiable. We hope this framework catalyzes empirical research, policy experimentation, and institutional commitment to building an inclusive quantum technologies community.

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