**Gender**

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**Overview**

The rationale for this chapter is to:

* Examine the significance of gender to education in an international perspective;
* Examine competing explanations for differences in educational opportunity, participation and attainment between men and women;
* Explore the future development of the field of gender and global education, with specific reference to ongoing monitoring and evaluation of gender equality in national contexts.

**Introduction**

This chapter is divided into 4 parts. It begins with a brief outline of the nature of gender, seeking to introduce readers to predominant explanations for behavioural, and other, differences between boys and girls/men and women. Secondly, the chapter introduces you to key scholarship within the field of gender and global education, focusing specifically on issues of access, participation and outcomes in education. Thirdly, we explore the future development of gender and global education, paying particular attention to the definitions of gender equality employed in international policy and scholarship, and the implications for combating gender-based discrimination in education. Lastly, we consider the need for ongoing monitoring of progress towards achieving gender equity in education, including the development of appropriate measures and indicators with which we can document and evaluate gender equity. This is particularly important in terms of the accountability of high-level stakeholders, such as governments and international aid agencies.

**What is gender?**

Men and women tend to behave in different ways across society as a whole, as well as in education in particular. Many theorists have sought to explain these patterns of behavioural difference, as well as the many instances where individual men and women behave atypically, or where groups of men and women behave similarly. Explanations for the differences observed between men and women mainly address two theoretical perspectives: the position that behavioural differences between men and women are due to inevitable biological distinctions between them, and the position that differences observed between men and women are socially constructed, or rooted in social expectations and representations of appropriate male and female behaviour.

**Biological difference between men and women**

Differences between men and women have been attributed to their specific and different biologies. The physiological differences between men and women have thus been used to explain intellectual, emotional, behavioural, and sexual differences. The view that men and women are ‘naturally different’ is widely-held across disciplines. Advocates of the innate differences perspective often refer to variation between men and women as ‘sex’ difference. Evolutionary development, hormones and brain structure are thought to underlie oppositional patterns of behaviour in men and women. Thus, the biology of men produces more aggressive behaviour, more logical patterns of thinking, and linear communication, which naturally predisposes them to particular roles in society. Conversely, women’s biology renders them more peaceful, emotional, intuitive and nurturing, in accordance with the primary roles they occupy. Such innate qualities are seen to present a ‘natural’ obstacle to full gender equality and have thus been used to explain inequalities between men and women in education, as well as in wider society.

**Socially constructed difference between men and women**

In contrast, some theorists view differences between men and women as socially developed, or constructed. Gender difference thus describes a social (rather than natural) division between men and women, and one that positions them in hierarchical opposition to one another. In other words, what is viewed as ‘male’ or masculine behaviour is defined not only as different, but as opposite, to behaviour which is regarded as ‘female’ or feminine. Further, qualities that are represented as ‘male’ (e.g. rationality) are positioned as superior to those represented as ‘female’ (e.g. emotion). A defining feature of ‘gender’ is that is while the division itself is fixed, modes of being ‘male’ or ‘female’ may vary (Delphy, 1993). Thus, gender identities may be diverse within the separate categories that men and women are seen to belong to. This view on gender difference therefore does not see any one property (or set of properties) as naturally belonging to a female or male body, as behaviours, qualities and characteristics (physical or otherwise) can be adopted varyingly by actors in different situations. Differences in roles, behaviours and attributes of men and women are reinforced through social structures, cultural representations, social and political discourse, and in individuals’ own practices (Jackson, 2005). Gender inequalities, including those in educations, thus arise from specific social and structural processes.

**Gender inequality in global education**

On a global level, gender differences in education manifest themselves in three primary areas: access to education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels; participation in education, including enrolment, attendance and access to curricula; and outcomes of education in terms of achievement on standardised tests, entry to higher levels of education and career trajectories. Inequality in access to and participation in education is justified by biological, as well as social perspectives on differences between boys and girls (although the two often intertwine). Girls are argued to be intellectually less capable than boys, and money spent by relatively poor families on educating girl children is thus seen as wasteful. Girls and women are also viewed as being *re*productive in function, rather than productive, and education for future employment is therefore not considered necessary (UNICEF, 2007). The social roles of girls also determine their limited participation in education; in many contexts, girls marry ‘out’ of their parental family, so any financial gains to be made from educating them would not benefit their parents. Further, the organisation of teaching, including curricula and the attitudes of teachers, has been argued to disadvantage girls across national contexts. The gender bias in education has been acknowledged in international conventions and declarations aimed at eliminating this inequality (e.g. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, 1981; Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995; Millennium Declaration, 2000).

There has been much attention paid to the exclusion of girls from all levels of education in sub-Saharan Africa in particular. An increased focus on the role of external aid organisations in funding initiatives for, and monitoring, gender equality have led to wider debates about the meaning of ‘gender equality’ in global education, the mechanisms by which this can be achieved and sustained, and responsibility/accountability. These discussions can similarly be applied to other developing contexts in which action for gender parity is largely reliant upon external aid and political support. The primary focus of this chapter is thus gender and education in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Access to education**

The UNESCO Education for All conferences (Jomtein, 1990; Dakar, 2000) and the Millennium Declaration (United Nations, 2000) committed countries to universalising primary education and to achieving gender equity in school enrolments by 2015. On a global level, an estimated 93 million children are not in school and of these, 52% are girl children (UNICEF, 2008). Dropout at the earliest stages of education disproportionately affects girls and the supposed gains in enrolment and participation made at lowest levels of schooling are not always sustained or reflected at higher levels. Numerous factors impinge on girls’ access to basic schooling, including cultural norms, concerns regarding their safety (particularly in fragile or unstable contexts) and limited resources. Of the 113 million children of primary school age in sub-Saharan Africa, over 32 million remain out of school (Lewin, 2009; Arnot and Fennell, 2008). Compared with a world average of 92% enrolment for girls and 95% enrolment for boys, enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa is half of this (UNICEF, 2006). However, it must be noted that within this region access to education does differ markedly between countries with some countries maintaining high levels of enrolment from primary through to secondary education, while others have overinflated enrolment rates at the lowest levels of schooling, which decline to below 50% at the highest levels of primary schooling (and which thus has implications for the transition into secondary schooling).

Similarly, while gender differences may appear negligible on an aggregate level, it is important to consider intra-national variations, such as those between rural and urban areas – even where figures for enrolment look relatively equal (Raynor, 2008). For example, in some South-Asian countries, boys under-enrol compared to girls and they are more likely to drop out beyond a certain level of schooling due to opportunities to take on unskilled, low-earning labour. The Millennium Development Goals, which focus largely on universal access to education, have been regarded as comprehensive markers of gender equality in education. However, access to education can be conceptualised in many ways: admission and progression by age, attendance, appropriate access to post-primary schooling opportunities and age or level-appropriate achievement. It has been argued that it is necessary to have an expanded definition of access because the prevailing criteria for having achieved gender parity can be mutually exclusive (Lewin, 2009). For example, many children of school-going age in sub-Saharan Africa are enrolled in school but may not be participating in the appropriate age range for school. Enrolment at non-appropriate levels of education can result in increased dropout, poor attendance and under- or non-achievement. Further, enrolment does not always signify attendance at school and enrolment data does not reveal dropout or compromised attendance. The mere enrolment of girls in school may not necessarily reflect their actual attendance and research indicates that they are likely to be taken out of school to contribute to household labour (Raynor, 2008; Unterhalter, 2008). Teachers and officials may not enforce compulsory attendance, perhaps due to their own lack of engagement with the necessity for gender equity in schooling, or stereotypes about the practices of rural and poor families, who are most likely not to send their girl children to school (Sundaram, Connolly and Hardman, 2010).

The three primary explanations for girls’ lower attendance, retention and attainment in school are lack of resources (family and school); cultural norms and expectations for girls; and the presumed and real heightened vulnerability of girls. The salience of biological explanations for differences between the treatment of boys and girls and the educational opportunities afforded to them is evident in predominant explanations for girls’ lower participation in education.

**Lack of resources**

Clearly, economic resources are scarce in many developing contexts. Primary education is not universally free of cost and in many instances, only some family members can attend school. The cost of education, as well as the need for young members of the family to supplement the family income and contribute to household labour, mean that regular attendance at school is impeded for many children. Where only few children in a given family are able to attend school, the male children are usually favoured. This is due to a number of reasons (UNICEF, 2008; Subramaniam, 2005; Bingham, 1992). Firstly, young women marry (or are expected to marry) out of the family. Prevailing kinship practices dictate that girls become members of their husband’s family on marriage and therefore their labour and eventual earnings will not benefit the natal family. Naturalised beliefs about women’s role as reproductive, as responsible for family and childcare, determine that investing in girls’ education is less likely to result in a good return for natal families. Beliefs about biological differences in appropriate roles for women and men in this way act as a barrier to girls’ participation in education. Secondly (and accordingly), young men are viewed as the primary economic providers for their parental families. The socially differentiated roles for men and women are largely premised on biological truths about the most ‘natural’ and therefore, appropriate functions for each gender. So, a family’s choice to prioritise the education of their male children serves both as a more secure investment as their future earnings will benefit the natal family, and this choice reflects prevailing cultural beliefs about appropriate future tasks for males as differentiated from females.

**Cultural norms**

In societies where girls are marginalised in education relative to boys, differences in the value accorded to girls and boys are apparent. This includes the devaluation of their socially constructed roles as carers, home-makers, less ambitious, less intelligent and so on. An emphasis towards analysing gender relations in the household has increasingly been seen as key to understanding gender inequality in education, social and economic life. Cultural norms in many developing contexts dictate that girls and women primarily need domestic and agricultural skills. Women are mainly engaged in household labour, childcare and provision of care for older relatives. Their work outside the home involves tending animals, caring for vegetable crops, fetching water and firewood and assisting their husbands in farming work (Raynor, 2008; UNICEF, 2006; Bingham, 1992). Further, girls are viewed as being less intelligent than boys. Therefore, their enrolment in education may be seen as a waste of resources (human and financial) and the innate skills of girls can be used more effectively to support other areas of community, social or family life. Lastly, girls are viewed as needing protection from the dangers and temptations of the public (male) world (e.g. Chege, 2008). This concern is two-pronged: there is the concern that girls will succumb to the temptations of the freedoms associated with the male world, including men themselves; secondly, there is a fear that girls will be abused by men on entry into the public sphere and that their virtue and honour (and that of their family) should be protected. The differential experiences and opportunities of education experienced by men and women are based on naturalised differences between them, which have in turn been used to legitimate their differential treatment. Subramaniam (2005) names the unequal division of labour to situate girls as responsible for reproductive activities, including the maintenance of the family home as a powerful example – a role which is based on assumptions about women’s natural instincts and appropriate roles. Thus, it is not the physical or biological differences between men and women, so much as the socially dictated aspects of gender that lead to the different ways in which men and women are constrained during their lives.

**Heightened vulnerability of girls**

Threats to the physical safety of girls and young women may prevent them from participating regularly in education in some developing contexts, which are frequently settings of fragility resulting from political instability and/or natural disaster. The heightened vulnerability of girls is not only entrenched in gender-specific assumptions about morality, sexuality and honour, but is borne out in practice. In reality, the increased exposure of girls to violence and abuse is not limited to the public sphere, and a vast body of research demonstrates the prevalence of abuse towards girls and women in the home and at the hands of relatives (WHO, 2002; Watts and Zimmerman, 2002; Heise, 1994). The commercial exploitation and abuse of women is also an emerging concern, and the ILO (2005) estimates that 98% of young people forced into commercial sexual exploitation are women and girls. Girls are also more vulnerable to discriminatory practices, such as sexual harassment and assault in educational and social settings. In contexts characterised by natural and socio-political instability, cultural and gendered norms may become more firmly entrenched and act as strengthened barriers to girls’ education (UNICEF, 2008). Girl children may be needed to support the household and rebuild homes, cultural norms regarding the appropriate gender roles and behaviour for men and women become reinforced, and where children become displaced and orphaned, they become easier targets for violence, child prostitution and trafficking – which disproportionately affects girl children. Education generally is more likely to be neglected as it is viewed as something of a luxury compared with more basic and immediate needs that need to be met, and the education of girls in particular is deprioritised due to specific socio-cultural beliefs and practices about gender. Schools may not be safe places for girls to inhabit and following armed conflict, girls are particularly exposed to abuse even within schools (Sundaram, Connolly and Hardman, 2010).

**How will the issue develop in the future?**

*Measuring progress in gender equality*

There is a clear need to continue striving for gender equality and equity in access to, participation in, and outcomes of education. Available data about patterns of enrolment, attendance and attainment, including official national statistics, often conceal patterns of gender discrimination at the micro or classroom level. Focusing solely on macro-trends in these areas of education overlooks the reproduction of gender norms by teachers, parents and young people themselves. In some sub-Saharan contexts, official data reveal that girls out-enrol boys at higher levels of education. However, in terms of indicators of gender equality these countries fare poorly and girls are underrepresented at higher levels of attainment, employment and society. Therefore, it is increasingly argued that outcomes-focused measures or indicators of gender parity need to be further developed and expanded in order to capture multiple facets of gender inequality in education.

The commitments made by the Millennium Declaration to tackle gender inequality in education are specific and time-bound. From the point of view of international donors and aid agencies, the Millennium Development Goals provided a series of ‘hard’ and quantifiable objectives and outcomes to illustrate and monitor what progress has been made towards achieving education for all. However, the Millennium Development Goals are very difficult to use for monitoring gender equality in a broader sense, due to the outcomes-oriented focus of the progress indicators (Barakat, *et al*., 2009; Lewin, 2009). Official data on enrolment is insufficient and does not reflect a shift in gender norms, gender roles or gender equality. Clearly, what is *meant* by ‘equality’ in any statements agreed upon by the international community is central to monitoring progress in achieving equality and evaluating whether it can be achieved at all.

*Gender equality versus gender equity*

The concepts of ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ are often used interchangeably in educational policy and interventions, and ‘equality’ is always taken to be a favourable outcome in education. While the former refers to the principle of equality of opportunity, the latter refers to the principle of ‘sameness’, which we should not always assume to be a preferable goal. If we take the example of access to education, then we could argue that it is favourable that equal numbers of girls and boys have access to school. Girls and boys should also have equal access to the same curricula, so for example, girls should be equally encouraged to study science subjects as are boys. If we look to achievement though, striving for equality or ‘sameness’ may be more problematic. In the UK, there is a current concern that girls are performing much better than boys on standardised tests in secondary school (e.g. Francis and Skelton, 2005). If achieving gender equality is the favoured goal in this case, then this could imply supporting boys to achieve at the same standard as girls, or reducing the performance of girls to be more in line with that of boys. In both cases, we would achieve gender *equality*. Similarly, gender parity in enrolment could be achieved by increasing the enrolment of girls to reach the level of boys, or by bringing the enrolment rates of boys down to be in line with that of girls. The latter is clearly an undesirable outcome in terms of achieving education for all, but could be used by governments to claim that equality had been achieved. It is therefore imperative that there is transparency around the definitions of terms employed in international and national policies, and that appropriate differentiation is made between the removal of social and structural barriers to achieve parity between the genders, and a blanket desire to make everything ‘the same’. We also need to think beyond a sole focus on quantitative outcomes as illustrative of progress, and analyse the processes by which these outcomes are secured, as well as other, simultaneous indicators of a more gender equal society or culture.

*What does ‘gender equality’ mean?*

Subramaniam (2005) argues that full equality would denote achievement of equality of opportunities to participate in education, equality of learning processes in school, equality of outcomes and equality of external results, such that job opportunities and earnings for men and women with similar educational qualifications would be equal. In current gender parity and human development indices, gender equality is largely measured by gender parity values for primary and secondary education (the relative proportion of girls to boys enrolled in either stage of education) and therefore does not necessarily reflect accurately gender equality in the country in a broader sense. Colclough (2008) and Subramaniam (2005) have both argued for the need to conceptualise gender equality in a more strategic, rather than practical sense. More emphasis needs to be given to process, structure and the rights of individuals to fundamental freedoms and choice about their lives, rather than the more needs-based approach that has frequently characterised gender and education work. A consideration of whether men and women are equally able to ‘do valuable acts and reach valuable states of being’ (Sen, 2002) necessitates an analysis of the position of men and women in a given context, gender-normative roles, the value given to girls and boys and the investments made in them – clearly more than a descriptive and decontextualised analysis of enrolment figures for girls and boys.

Using gender parity as a measure of gender equality having been achieved represents only ‘formal equality’ as it is termed by Subramaniam (2005). Formal equality can be used to deny socio-structural differences between men and women and that disadvantage women. In this sense, ‘equality’ measured primarily in terms of outcomes (rather than process) is premised on an assumption of ‘sameness’ between men and women and a denial of socially constructed differences in power, roles, value, opportunities and possibilities between men and women. Understanding *how* differences between men and women arise is key to conceptualising, addressing and monitoring gender inequality and it has been argued that indicators such as equality of treatment in education and quality of experience in education are more useful representations of equality of process and therefore of equality in a wider, social sense (Unterhalter, 2008). What Subramaniam refers to ‘substantive gender equality’ is therefore a more useful guide on which to base indicators of progress in achieving goals of gender equality in education. A first step towards assessing progress towards substantive gender equality entails exploring what it means to be a man or woman in a given context, including what roles are considered appropriate for men and women to perform in a given context and how these are valued socially and economically. These may determine the opportunities to which they have access. So, while schools may be available in theory for both boys and girls, barriers imposed by the socially differentiated gender roles e.g. work in the home for girls, may prevent them from accessing education fully.

*Data and tools for measuring gender equality and equity in education*

Despite an almost global consensus on the need to make education universally available and not to discriminate on the basis of gender, the simple ratification of numerous international treaties does not, of course, imply the upholding of these obligations to protect and secure the rights of men and women. To help secure countries’ observance of these obligations, UN organisations and international donors require national reports to monitor and evaluate the progress made towards diminishing inequalities. Tomasevski (2003) points out that far from all countries (or even the majority of countries) have submitted any such reports however. With regard to combating exclusion from education and girls’ marginalisation in particular, monitoring and evaluation systems remain sparse and inconsistent.

In order to monitor and evaluate the progress being made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, Education for All objectives and the Dakar goals, we must ensure an appropriate conceptualisation of ‘gender equality’ as well as rigorous data on which to base any conclusions about gender equality. This necessitates the development of robust and context-appropriate indicators, systems and tools for data collection. As discussed above, an exclusive focus on numbers in measuring equality in education can on the one hand present real progress e.g. equality in enrolment figures, and on the other hand, give a very partial account of gender equality in education (by ignoring classroom processes, factors which influence attendance, participation and dropout and wider social factors which impact on educational outcomes) and can also conceal patterns of gender-based discrimination. A full consideration of gender equality in education needs then to analyse gender equality in terms of rights *to* education, rights *in* education and rights *through* education (including a recognition that education equality links with wider equality goals) (Colclough, 2005). Reliable data which reflects these areas of equality in education is necessary for progress in a fuller sense to be measured and evaluated.

Single indicators or measures cannot tell us much about the quality of education being received, the equality of treatment and the value attributed to girls’ educational achievement relative to that of boys. Equal numbers of boys and girls enrolled in school do not tell us about attendance through the school day, participation in lessons or dropout during the school year. Similarly, equal numbers of male and female teachers do not tell us whether processes of teaching, teacher-pupil interactions, and curricula employed, are gender-aware and seek to disrupt discriminatory gender norms, beliefs and practices. For example, textbooks and the attitudes of teachers may reinforce social norms that deem it more appropriate for girls to take responsibility for household chores and boys to participate actively in the public world and to become primary economic providers. Equality in achievement alone does not tell us whether community norms regarding gender roles are shifting or whether this equality translates to equality of employment opportunities or reward for young men and women. As was argued above, equality is not always a desirable outcome in education and more emphasis should therefore be given to measuring equality of opportunities to engage with education.

**Conclusion**

Subramaniam (2005, p405) notes that gender inequalities within education are likely to reinforce wider social inequalities, including those women face in employment, political representation and the public arena generally. Thus, measures of gender equality should not only be gender-aware but also gender-transformative in challenging and disrupting gendered power relations that constrain the possibilities available to women and men through education.

**Questions for Further Investigation**

1. How are different approaches to explaining gender difference used to justify differential access to, participation in, and outcomes of education?
2. Why might it be important to define access to education more broadly than simply enrolment in school?
3. What are the primary criticisms of current measures of gender equality in developing contexts?
4. Why is the way in which gender difference is explained important to considering how gender equality should be monitored?

**Suggested Further Reading**

Fennell, S. and Arnot, M. (2008) *Gender Education and Equality in a Global Context.* London and New York, N.Y: Routledge. This research-based book discusses the need to reconceptualise ‘gender equality’ in a global context and provides case studies of local action towards gender equality in education in a range of settings in the developing world. The studies provide excellent examples of the numerous pathways for achieving gender equality and explore the interrelation between gender, poverty and education.

UNESCO (2003). *Gender and education for all: the leap to equality.* EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4. Paris: UNESCO. This report summarises the state of gender equality in education in the international community. It emphasises the need to look beyond numbers in measuring and monitoring gender equality and suggests that national governments focus on securing equality in classroom processes, as well as transitions into higher education and employment.

Unterhalter, E. (2005) ‘Global inequalities, capabilities, social justice and the Millennium Development Goal for gender equality in education’, *International Journal of Education and Development,* *25*, pp. 111-122. This paper argues for a consideration of the capabilities approach in conceptualising gender equality. It argues that more emphasis needs to be given to wellbeing and conditions for human flourishing in governmental policies for measuring gender equality, in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goal.

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