

ACHIEVING GENDER EQUITY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CHALLENGES FOR SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

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Abstract

The current economic and financial downturn has created much concern over its effect on the achievement of sustainable development. The lack of attention to achieving gender equality will not only slow down development but will jeopardise all efforts. While progress is observed in ensuring gender balance in education, which is a key instrument for human emancipation, access to resources, employment opportunities, and representation in decision-making levels are key areas that can transform the lives of women worldwide and contribute to the achievement of developmental needs of a nation. Yet, despite this increasing awareness everywhere, women and girls today face gender-based discrimination. By contrast, where women and girls are treated as inferior to men and boys, a vicious circle of limited education will create undesirable situations that will impede meaningful development. The trust of the paper is to unravelled the barriers to ensuring gender equality in the attainment of secondary education and the challenges and strategies that school administrators can implore to address the situation. The paper concluded with suggestions; one of which is for government(s) to organize enlightenment campaigns to create better awareness for society to understand the importance gender equality.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Administrative Strategies, School Administration

Introduction

Educating girls achieves even greater results. When girls go to school, they tend to delay marriage, have fewer but healthier children, and contribute more to family income and national productivity. Women's participation in politics and public sector economic activities falls below that of their counterparts, often due to a lack of education for girls. National Democratic Institute (2016) reported that in the past 20 years, women have doubled their global numbers in parliaments, from 11 to 22 percent. Seventeen percent of ministers globally are women, and in 2015 there were 18 women as heads of state or government. Women's participation in politics is socially transformative. Education is a key strategy for gender equality and women's empowerment, yet millions of women around the world are denied access to education (Menon-Sen, 2005). Previous research (Hill & King, 1993; Klasen, 2003; Loncove, 2008) pinpoints the reasons for investing in women's education and shows how the low level of literacy, not only hurts women's lives but also the lives of their children and on their country's economic development (Hill & King, 1993; Klasen, 2003).

Global Education Monitoring Report, (2020) revealed that female enrolment accounted for 55% of the total increase in primary and secondary enrolment between 1995 and 2018, growing by 180 million, from 469 million to 649 million. According to the report, gender differences persist in learning outcomes and subject choices. School-based factors partly explain these differences. There are also social, cultural, and economic forces that structure different expectations, aspirations, and performances for girls and boys, women and men.

Research also shows that illiterate women have high levels of fertility and mortality, poor nutritional status, and low earning potential. 1991 census figures, it is evident that about 60 % of the male population is literate and only 40 % of the female population is literate. The literacy rate among females is low. A woman's lack of education also hurts the health and well-being of her children, especially where the primary responsibility for child-rearing and home-making lies with the mother. When mothers are educated, they are more capable of nurturing their children and are less frequently ill than those who are not educated (Floro & Wolf, 1990; Hill & King, 1993; Nussbaum, 2000; Brighouse & Unterhalter, 2002; Klasen, 2003; Chaabouci, 2006).

Definitions of Terms and Concepts

Gender is a social and cultural construct, that distinguishes differences in the attributes of men and women, and accordingly refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women. Gender-based roles and other attributes, therefore, change over time and vary with different cultural contexts. The concept of gender includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviors of both women and men (femininity and masculinity)

Gender equity is the process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on an even playing field. Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions, treatment, and opportunities for realizing their full potential, human rights, and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural, and political development.

Gender equality is, therefore, the equal valuing by society of the similarities and differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their homes, community, and society. Gender equity is one means of achieving gender equality.

Gender equality in education would imply that girls and boys are ensured and offered the same chances and treatment in access, process, and outcome of education of good quality and which is free from any stereotypes (UNESCO, 2009)

Sustainable development is about finding better ways of doing things, both for the future and the present. A sustainable development approach can bring many benefits in the short to medium term. The concept of sustainable development aims to maintain economic advancement and progress while protecting the long-term value of the environment; it “provides a framework for the integration of environment policies and development strategies” (United Nations General Assembly, 1987). Sustainable development implies the fulfillment of several conditions: preserving the overall balance, respect for the environment, and preventing the exhaustion of natural resources. For this work, it implies

the sustainable management of the use of resources within the school, and its rational management of male and female students in secondary schools for equal opportunities.

Gender Equality and Education for Sustainable Development

Until women and men have equal opportunities to participate in public and private life, as community members, citizens, decision-makers, and leaders, we will not be living in a sustainable, fair world for all. Gender equality and women's rights are both a goal and a means of achieving sustainable development. School administrations should strive towards the achievement of gender equality and encourage girls to accord the girl child priority of sustainable development. Improvements in girls' education have not translated into reduced gender gaps in the labor market or women's equal ownership and control over economic resources, and the gender gap in earnings remains pervasive across the globe

Education is only one of the areas of social policy behind the breaking down of gender inequalities. The concept of equality between men and women was set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Since then it has been foregrounded and elaborated on in several international agreements, most prominently the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1979, the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 on women, peace and security.

Role of School Administrators in Gender Mainstreaming in Schools

Gender mainstreaming is the ultimate process in efforts towards achieving gender equality in education or any other sector. Until a country succeeds in reaching the goal of mainstreaming gender fully into education (as well as other fields), specific efforts are needed to reach that stage. Different countries are at different stages of gender mainstreaming, and almost all are far from achieving it fully successfully. Program objectives are more likely to be reached if the interests and experiences of both women and men are taken into account at all stages of the programming process. The needs and interests of all intended beneficiaries are more likely to be satisfied in this way (UNESCO, 2009)

Norms and dominant ideas about appropriate roles and activities for men and women can be reflected in school curricula and learning materials, and differential treatment of teachers towards girls and boys. In this way, education systems can perpetuate or reproduce existing gender stereotypes (Durrani, 2008; Stromquist, 2006)

Such stereotypes in education may be an important factor behind continued segregation in the labor market. A rising number of girls are completing secondary education and passing exams, but this has not led to the elimination of 'horizontal' segregation in the labor market, and there is a tendency of men and women to pool in different sectors of employment, often with different levels of status, remuneration, and security. According to the ILO, horizontal segregation decreased until the 1990s, but since then it has been rising again (ILO, 2012 ILO, 2016)

However, school lessons that include critical reflection on norms around masculine and feminine roles can help to break down such stereotypes. For example, targeted initiatives can challenge gender stereotypes about particular school subjects like science and maths. Also, school programs that support students in examining their perceptions about gender can lead to more equitable of domestic labor. Raising consciousness of gender equality,

and developing participants ‘relational resources - the interpersonal skills they use in relationships, meant that women were able to negotiate a new sharing of responsibilities within the home (Murphy-Graham, 2009).

A growing body of research has shown school-related gender-based violence to be a widespread and pervasive problem, which undermines gender equality in education (UNESCO, 2015). For example, a survey carried out by ICRW in India found that violence is an integral part of the schooling experiences of young adolescents, especially boys (Achyut et al., 2011). The study found that two-thirds of boys ages 12-14 in a cluster of low-income schools had experienced at least one form of violence in the last three months at school. Physical violence and emotional violence were common, affecting 61% and 49% of boys, respectively. Although fewer girls than boys reported experiencing any form of violence (42%), the rates for physical and emotional violence were still high (38% and 26%, respectively). Studies have revealed similar figures in other countries across the globe (Barker et al, 2012). School Administrators can be central to preventing and addressing violence, and has the potential to encourage students to question existing gendered behaviors, through reflective tasks, questioning, and critical thinking.

However, schools can be a site for behaviors that also reinforce existing norms and behaviors that sanction gender-based violence. For example, girls may be subject to verbal and physical sexual harassment by male students or teachers; and bullying in schools is often directed at children perceived as transgressing norms of masculinity or femininity (Parkes, 2015). Corporal punishment may be used to enforce such norms – to ‘toughen’ boys, for instance, or to teach girls to be submissive (Morrow and Singh, 2015; Nandita et al, 2014). This issue is increasingly pressing in a world in which insecurity and violent conflict have sadly become more commonplace, both locally and internationally.

What is also important is the value of education in providing girls with confidence, insights, and networks to challenge gender inequitable norms and power balances that are associated with violence. Girls’ increased confidence to speak out may likely be masking possible reductions in the amount of violence taking place (Parkes and Heslop 2013).

Gender may intersect with other forms of difference or disadvantage and result in stigmatization. For example, girls and boys may be stigmatized, excluded, and denigrated in schools when they are perceived as flouting norms about gender and sexuality (Youdell 2005; Dunne 2007). Interventions in schools have addressed homophobic bullying in schools by combining interactive teaching with young people reflecting on their values, beliefs, and stereotypes, with whole-school approaches that strengthen school systems and teacher interventions to tackle and prevent bullying (Mitchell et al 2014).

From the opinions and empirical studies done, the school administrator has a lot of responsibilities in achieving gender equity. Being the leader of the school lies the task of ensuring that every child is protected as he/she stands proxy for the parents.

Intervention Models for School Administrators

USAID Report on Office of Women in Development by the EQUATE Project, Management Systems International (Prime Contractor) in 2008 identified the following intervention models in achieving gender equity in secondary schools;

- Train teachers to understand how their perceptions or expectations of male and female students may influence how they assess students' progress, mark examinations, and provide feedback.
- Include an assortment of question types (prose, charts, pictures, tables, etc.) when developing test, examination, or assessment questions to respond to the diversity in students' learning styles.
- Use various question types (multiple choice, essay, short answer, etc.) and weigh the test items to ensure that students with different learning styles have equal opportunities to succeed.
- Balance classroom assessment methods to evaluate group and individual work using verbal and written evaluation tools.
- Review existing tests, examinations, and assessments to determine whether the examples and language used are free of gender bias and stereotypes. Remove any gender-specific content and ensure that examples reflect a balance in girls' and boys' experiences.
- Raise parents' awareness of their rights and responsibilities in education and of the importance of schooling for boys and girls.
- Train communities in monitoring access and quality through parent-teacher associations and school management committees, ensuring that women are part of their management.
- Increase school safety and decrease violence by maintaining safe and secure latrines; protecting girls on their way to and from school; abandoning corporal punishment; training teaching staff and students to prevent violence; and enforcing teacher codes of conduct.
- Undertake annual classroom studies to monitor teachers' interactions with boys and girls to ensure equitable student treatment

Supervisory Models for School Administrators on Teachers for Gender Equity in the Classroom

- Train teachers to define their roles as mentors and facilitators and not as instructors and knowledge experts aiming to disseminate information
- As a facilitator, the teacher should ensure that the physical and social environment of the school promotes healthy relationships between boys and girls
- Sitting arrangements and all activities should as far as possible be done in mixed groups in co-educational schools and single-sex, it should cut across class, caste, region, and faith.
- Equal participation of boys and girls in the teaching-learning process must be ensured

- To ensure greater participation of girls, participatory activities like- role play, problem- solving, and quiz, etc must be adopted in the teaching of languages, social science, and science
- Allocation of classroom duties should reflect gender neutrality. Boys and girls should participate equally in maintaining cleanliness, observing classroom decorum, decorating the class, and conducting routine classroom chores
- The teacher must also entrust the responsibility of organizing classroom activities equally to both sexes
- To develop effective oral communication skills, reading, and recitation should be jointly assigned to boys and girls with correct pronunciation, voice modulation, and expressions
- The teacher should be able to identify slow learners and organize appropriate remedial classes for them. – In the teaching-learning process, special emphasis must be given to sharing of examples of women achievers who have contributed to different fields. This will help in attitudinal reconstruction
- The use of visual aids like pictures and puppets, depicting women working in fields along with men, in hospitals as doctors and nurses, sharing household chores with men, etc. can also help to create gender inclusion and parity
- In the transaction of subjects like mathematics, sciences, social science, and languages, care should be taken to include examples of both boys and girls, men and women drawn from different walks of life so that the message of equal capability gets highlighted
- The classroom culture should be built in a manner that interactions between boys and girls reflect mutual respect. The classroom ethos should be made open and supportive so that both boys and girls feel free to share their personal experiences without apprehension
- The concept of equality of sexes may be explained by elaborating on the intelligence and capabilities of girls and women. The teacher must also ensure equal participation of boys and girls in activities like drawing, painting, music, and dance (Srivaster, 2016)

Derivatives of Gender Equity

The paper highlighted the following educational implications:

Political Participation and Emancipation: Education can affect a woman’s political participation and engagement through imparting skills that enable her to participate in democratic processes.

Skill Acquisition: Literacy, and the critical reflection skills that a good quality education should provide, are necessary tools for engaging in both the social and political life of an individual

Social Participation: Educated women are more likely to participate in civic life and to advocate for community improvements; and numeracy enables individuals to question and critique government figures, strengthening processes of accountability.

Building Self-Confidence: Substantive equality in education supports organizing around women's rights, by encouraging critical reflection on gender inequalities, building confidence to speak out about injustice, and helping to foster social and political empowerment. At the same time, women's organizing is needed for progress in education; recent studies have demonstrated the important role of women's activists in holding governments to account to national and international commitments and pressing for policy changes for gender equality

Economic Empowerment: Education can lead to increased economic activity but not necessarily improved opportunities and decent quality work. In Ghana, for example, despite increases in women's education and female labor force participation, women's wage employment stagnated.

Unemployment for women rose, as did informal economic activity and self-employment, although more years of education increased the chances of securing wage employment (Sackey, 2005).

Conclusion

Quality, retention, and achievement are essential elements of an education strategy designed to ensure that boys and girls maximize their full potential. As the Gender Equality in Education Framework indicates, addressing issues of access is insufficient to ensure that boys and girls receive the maximum benefit from their education. Getting children into school is crucial; ensuring that they stay in school, learn, and achieve requires more. It is indeed a role that both parents and school administrators school collaborate to bridge the gap between educational opportunities for male and female students in secondary schools

Suggestions

The paper, therefore, suggested thus:

- I. School administrators should identify and address gender issues immediately if it is observed
- II. School administration should be mindful of enrolment issues which is the starting point of gender discrimination by ensuring enrolment opportunities for both sex
- III. Analyze how specific educational programmes and policies impact girls and boys differently, taking into account different roles, responsibilities, needs, and interests and addressing them during the project design process.
- IV. Integrate gender awareness components into pre-and in-service teacher training.
- V. Incorporate gender considerations into activities of curricula implementation and learning materials.

- VI. School administrators should identify and report on indicators such as girls' and boys' net and gross enrolment, gender parity in enrolment, equality in educational outcomes, and girls' and boys' completion rates.
- VII. Make interventions for girls more effective by integrating them into a coherent overall strategy for education reform.
- VIII. Develop practical tools to support programming staff in designing, implementing, reporting on, and evaluating programs that address equitable access and quality from a gender perspective
- IX. The government should build more schools for girls to improve the number of those admitted into the school

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