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UNBIASED EDUCATION: ACHIEVING GENDER EQUALITY IN LEARNING SYSTEMS

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Abstract

Gender equality in education is about equal access and creating a fair and inclusive learning environment for all individuals. This article discusses how gender bias remains embedded in educational systems, from curricula to institutional policies, and how philosophical approaches and global policies aim to address these challenges. Using a literature study approach, this research examines the thoughts of figures such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Paulo Freire, and Nancy Fraser in highlighting the importance of education that liberates and empowers. Furthermore, this paper explores the impact of globalization on gender equality in education and how initiatives such as *Education for All* and the *Sustainable Development Goals* contribute to reducing gender disparities worldwide. This study emphasizes the need for policy transformation, equitable teaching methods, and gender-responsive curricula in creating an education system that is truly inclusive and empowering for all.

Keywords: Gender equality; Inclusive Education; Gender Bias; Educational Justice

INTRODUCTION

Education is a great foundation where equality and inclusion exist, but gender inequalities in education remain a world issue today. Generally speaking, these differentials manifest themselves in access, participation, and/or outcome in learning for both females and males. The Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2020a) states that there are barriers to the education of girls in the so-called lower and conflict-affected regions. Factors include economic deprivation, cultural preferences for boys studying, poor school infrastructure, such as lack of safety and sanitation facilities, and many more disadvantages for females. Early marriages and the overwhelming burden of unpaid care work further add to the shortfalls females experience compared to boys concerning transitions to secondary and higher levels of education in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. This is compounded by issues such as the rural-urban divide, ethnic discrimination, and disability that individually and cumulatively limit females' educational opportunities further.

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Gender equality in education is essentially a human right, fundamental to forging an inclusive, equitable, and just society. Equal access to quality education for all persons regardless of gender is central to redressing decades-old inequalities and creating avenues for economic, social, and political participation. Major advances notwithstanding, expressions of gender bias still lurk underneath affecting the educational experiences and outcomes of individuals from different corners of the world. Often, latent gender bias sets in forms such as unequal access to resources, discriminatory practices in teaching, stereotyped curriculums, and social attitudes that obstruct the development of potential in both girls and boys (UNESCO, 2020b). Gender stereotypes within schools shape student aspirations, subject choices, and career paths, ultimately determining life chances for many generations to come. Although much focus has gone into the gender gap within education attainment, much less consideration is given to understand the wider cultural and institutional agendas that are sustaining gendered educational experiences (Madeleine Arnot, 2002).

Gender bias in education may not be overtly visible, but this concept is so deeply embedded in the structures and procedures of education worldwide. Curricula, methods of teaching, policies in schools, and the interactions in classrooms work to reflect and reinforce traditional gender norms. For instance, textbooks mention little of women's achievements in political leadership, science, and glory while celebrating men; definitions project women in social science or biology and men in science or technology while viewing gendered roles in children (DeJaeghere, J., Parkes, J., & Unterhalter, 2013). Gendered language and interactions between teachers and students also collude in keeping stereotypical notions alive: "Females are supposed to be better in Maths, meanwhile girls shine in Languages or Arts" (Aslam et al., 2020). Such subtle forms of bias play into developing the students' self-perception, which in turn works to further shape their particular academic interest, thereby promoting a gendered divide in terms of choices of subject area and career aspiration (UNESCO, 2023). Therefore, fighting discrimination based on gender goes much further than the equal right to be educated; there is a necessity for a thorough revision of educational content, teaching methods, and institutional policies to create a truly inclusive and empowering atmosphere for all students.

The philosophical approaches toward education have historically pointed to the fact that those systems should empower and be outlets for the injustices of all. Mary Wollstonecraft was one of the first advocates of women's

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rights and claimed education was to provide knowledge and then semantically instill within liberty, equality, and the dignity of man (Sandrine Bergès & Alan Coffee, 2016). Such theory becomes the basis for later feminist pedagogies that would dismantle oppression structures limiting girls and women from educational opportunities. Paulo Freire's "education as liberation" builds on something very much along these lines, saying that education should be a means of both personal and social transformation (Kester & Aryoubi, 2020). However, Paulo Freire argued that education systems should allow students critical examination and inquiry into such societal inequalities. Gender equality then does not concern just access as regards education, but even promotes critical thinking, agency, and the ability to participate holistically in society. These philosophical bases indeed stress the demand of education systems not merely being gender neutral but also transformative on gender grounds to students as regard challenging the norms and broadening possibilities open to them.

At the global level, organizations such as UNESCO and the United Nations have long emphasized that gender equity is integral to sustainable development. In pursuit of this, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development speaks of inclusive, equitable, and quality education, particularly regarding SDG 4, or Sustainable Development Goal 4; elimination of gender disparities and provision of equal opportunities for both girls and boys being part of this endeavor. Initiatives such as the Education for All (EFA) movement brought the matter of gender inequality in education into global focus and sped up efforts to expand access to education, with a special emphasis on low-income countries. However, the access has in some ways improved, yet some barriers to women and girls in education remain: cultural perceptions, marriage at an early age, gender-based violence-e.g. rape inside and outside schools-and limited opportunities in terms of work after graduation. This thus means that expanding educational opportunities for gender equity must also focus on the quality of education itself and the opportunities for personal and social enhancement it provides.

However, this is not the case with education only. Gender equality continues to be challenged with various policy advancements. In most countries, for instance, many consider gender equality policies poorly implemented or lacking in the necessary resources and accountability mechanisms to make their effects known (Stromquist, 2002). However, where they are enacted, policies fail to affect deeply entrenched cultural norms and practices that reproduce gender inequality. In some cases, gender parity

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policies can be touted for political purposes but lack sufficient reform or active engagement of the educational community (Madeleine Arnot, 2002). The continuously evolving issues on society's norms, such as digital technologies affecting gender relations, require that policies for genders also constantly be adaptive. As Aikman et al. (2005) argue, policies must not only concern the inside of the classroom but also extend to measures addressing broader social issues affecting girls' education, such as violence, poverty, and access to resources. It is solely by such measures that it would be possible, through comprehensive and contextually relevant policy provisions, to bring real gender equity in education into the realm of the possible.

While achieving gender equality in education is an ethical necessity, it also constitutes an economic and social necessity. Research has shown that when girls and women have equal access to education, the benefits surpass the single dimension of empowering women and girls. An educated woman can make a significant contribution to economic development, decreasing poverty, and enhancing well-being in her family (UNESCO, 2023). Gender equality in education promotes the group's democratic participation and overall stability of societies, which increases the pool of educated people contributing to civic engagement and leadership roles. Eliminating gender barriers in education also contributes to breaking the cycle of poverty, as educated women are more likely to invest in their children's education, resulting in cross-generational ripple effects (Stromquist, 2023). Thus, addressing gender bias and inequality in education is an immediate step toward an even more important social advancement and sustainable development.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach focusing on library research. In this approach, the study used books, research reports, journals, and various other literature as references to explain descriptive data related to the topic (Hadi & Asrori, 2021). In terms of the general, this study explores the main topic through diverse literature sources. This method aims to ensure a clear, objective, systematic, analytical, and critical representation of the relationship between gender equality and Islamic education.

Data collection in this study utilized literature sources as well as non-empirical data presented briefly and systematically in a textual form. Most steps involved collecting relevant references, followed by classification, presentation, systematic analysis, and in-depth explanation. However, the

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analytical technique used was content analysis (Muhajir, 2017), which involves identifying and categorizing specific elements in content to reach significant insights and conclusions.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the principles of being critical, reliable, and relevant for knowledge development, seeking to identify contradictions and arguments related to this topic and to offer ways to achieve a more balanced integration. Methodologically, this study is oriented towards achieving gender equality in learning systems.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Gender Bias in Curriculum and Teaching Practices

In terms of curricula, gender bias is largely concealed in the wider context. It is known to propagate stereotypes that are not readily overt, and textbooks depict men as scientists, leaders, or major historical figures, while women are usually portrayed as housewives or supporting characters (UNESCO, 2022). Such a subtle form of representation generally shapes the perceptions of students toward gender roles and their capacities. Over time, these perceptions influence aspirations and career choices that are limited by such social norms.

In addition, the teaching-agreeing interaction may be an example of an indirect bias. Teachers may be biased toward boys when it comes to calling them to answer a question in science or mathematics, while a female student would be encouraged in the arts or languages (Boateng et al., 2021). This practice, although not deliberately meant in practice, would imply to the students that they have a potential that is not necessarily inherent to sex, thus gender-specific academic abilities.

Internationally, a study reported within the borders of Australia, the TIMSS, indicates how academic achievement differs between genders: boys normally score higher than girls on mathematics and science tests when they are quite young; this, however, increases with greater age (Caitlin Cassidy, 2024). According to Dr. Joanna Sikora from the Australian National University, even small gaps ignored can result in huge inequality down the line.

2. Philosophical Perspectives on Education

Education has been postulated as a number one right for women and concurrently as a stepping stone in the ongoing struggle for attaining social equality. In her indispensable book "A Vindication of the Rights of

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Women," she argued against the established belief that women are naturally inferior to men and defended the viewpoint that the root cause of the problem is in women's lack of education (Wollstonecraft, 2011). Her thought significantly paved the way for feminist considerations and the very critique itself of an inequitable education system.

In the above three, Paulo Freire was greatly responsible for the belief in education as a way of emancipation. He is of the belief that the process of education should never be monological but dialogical and humanizing (Freire, 1970). Regarding gender, his approach stresses being critically aware that both males and females can identify and take steps against the oppressive forces that affect their lives.

In light of these thinkers, what Nancy Fraser argues gives a systemic approach to social justice. She differentiates between claims to wealth and recognition, pointing out that educating people about economic inequality requires informed understanding of cultural/gender identity (Fraser, 2009). She casts education as in urgent need of structural reform, acknowledging from history the multidimensional reform required.

3. Global Policies and the Pursuit of Gender Equality

The international frameworks on Education for All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) present specific pointers on closing the gender gaps in education. EFA engages all members in the quest for universal basic education, while SDG 4 pursues ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education for all (UNESCO, 2022). Implementation has, however, remained a challenge. Outdated patriarchal norms, lack of funds, and negligence limit efforts for almost all of these developing countries towards achieving gender equality in education. It is recognized by AP News (2023) that despite 'commitment-in-policy', the political will or capability is not there for almost all countries to change the education system wholly. There and then, progress on SDG 4 continues to be painfully slow and lopsided.

UN Women places continuous advocacy for a gender empowerment approach to education, which cuts across different sectors. They argue that inclusive and quality education is one of the pillars through which gender equality can be realized in life experiences-meeting the needs of work, politics, and society (UN Women, n.d.). Hence, blendedness of educational and social policies is much needed. International policies are for the development of education without gender divides, such as Education for

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All (EFA) and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). EFA assists all people in the realization of universal basic education, whereas SDG 4 provides assurance for inclusive and quality education to all (UNESCO, 2022). But one can hardly manage the implementation.

Such limited awareness, most importantly, is combined with the role of patriarchal society and small finance budget by a number of poor countries, which is a big hindrance to realize gender equality in education. Even AP News (2023) has it that, despite the 'commitment-in-policy, the political will or capability is not there for almost all countries to change the education system wholly. Here in, it continues to reflect slow and lopsided progress on SDG 4. UN Women constantly advocates for integrated education that empowers women and girls. They claim that inclusive, quality education itself will do much more towards achieving gender equality in other spheres of life, in work, politics, and society (UN Women, n.d.). Hence, there is great necessity for the blending of education with social policies.

4. The Impact of Globalization on Gender Equality in Education

The impact of globalization on education and gender issues is rather complicated. While information access, international networks, and new practices can mean so much for possibilities of inclusive reform, economic and cultural uses of globalization may further entrench existing inequalities, especially when one thinks about policy-making that is not attuned to context at the local level. For instance, the priority of economic globalization would have many countries encourage vocational education and STEM education, both traditionally male-dominated fields, without attention to how women may equally take part. This widens the gender skill gaps. Furthermore, mainstream cultural values imposed by global powers may stand in stark contrast with local values that promote gender equality (DeJaeghere, J., Parkes, J., & Unterhalter, 2013).

However, initiatives such as She Creates Change by Room to Read have demonstrated that media and arts can be powerful agents for education. This program uses storytelling from the girls' real-life experiences across countries to create awareness and resilience against cultural barriers. It demonstrates that gender education can take place not only within a formal curriculum but also through contextual creative expression.

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CONCLUSION

Gender equality in education is a serious global concern that calls for more than access; it requires that systemic biases embedded in curricula, teaching practices, and institutional structures be modified. This study has shown how educational content and interactions between teachers and students continue to perpetuate traditional gender roles, ultimately curtailing both female and male aspirations in academic and professional domains. Findings indicate that systems of education must therefore be subjected to critique and restructuring to make them inclusive and empowering, if these disparities are to be eliminated.

Philosophical interventions by Mary Wollstonecraft, Paulo Freire, and Nancy Fraser refer to such a perspective in which education is not only a neutral ground but becomes a site for social justice transformation. They argue for an education that encourages critical consciousness, self-awareness, and agency for especially marginalized genders in achieving socially equitable outcomes. This study concludes that globalization has both aided and undermined gender equality in education. While it does create opportunities for international networking and innovation, it can also reinforce gender divisions in its implementation if local contexts are ignored. Thus, a parity approach to education must be multi-focused one that brings together philosophical, pedagogical, policy, and cultural approaches to ensure the learning system values and upholds the dignity of all genders.

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