

ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice: Gender and education

November 2019

Foreword

Despite recognised efforts to improve access of girls and women to education, many still face numerous barriers to access learning opportunities, ranging from basic education to higher education level. Several factors hinder their participation and achievement in the formal education system and contribute to significant gender inequalities in education: namely, the quality of teaching and insensitive gender teaching and learning environments, plus cultural and social norms lead many girls and young women to leave education altogether.

Prioritising gender equality in and through education is crucial to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that the international community set itself to achieve by 2030. Yet, one third of the way to that deadline, new projections prepared by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Global Education Monitoring Report show that the world will fail its SDG education commitments without a major escalation of progress.

This collection of ESRC-DFID-funded research provides valuable evidence on strategies to ensure that we meet our pledge to eliminate gender inequalities in education. Beyond ensuring that every child – both girls and boys – is in school and learning, it highlights new approaches to how gender equality in and through education can be measured, which is crucial to achieving more than just gender parity in education.

The collection also demonstrates the need to work together to bring about change. In the case of Honduras, for example, community and teacher partnerships are working to promote gender equality and equip adolescents with the skills and information they need to take charge of their reproductive health and complete secondary school. The Honduras case also highlights the benefits of targeted social-emotional learning activities, which can be particularly effective for girls in conflict-affected contexts.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and agenda 2063 provide new opportunities in the long struggle towards achieving gender equality. We need robust evidence if we want accountability and the realisation of girls' and women's rights. This will help us to better understand how different groups of women are excluded because of their gender, age, dis-ability, class, ethnicity, religion, and many other factors. However, data alone is not enough; we need to



Photo: Kieran Dodds/Tearfund/Panos Pictures

Girls study in a classroom at a primary school in Malawi.

engage with our partners to drive policy change aligned with the needs of the stakeholders.

This collection is looking at new approaches to contribute to gender equality in educational systems. Both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063 – The Africa We Want provide new opportunities in the long struggle towards achieving gender transformative education.

Dr Rita Bissoonauth

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Key messages

- New approaches to measuring gender equality in education are crucial to actions that go beyond just gender parity.
- Collaborative approaches to curriculum design can help promote gender equality.
- Non-formal learning strategies that include skills such as social-emotional learning opportunities should be considered to promote girls' learning in conflict-affected contexts.

Measuring gender equality in education

Despite more girls than boys enrolling in primary school in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, large numbers of girls, particularly from the poorest socioeconomic groups, drop out and do not progress to secondary school. However, current statistics fail to reveal the complexities of how inequalities hold girls back. Researchers from University College London (UCL), in collaboration with partners in South Africa and Malawi, are working to get more accurate and usable information to better understand how entrenched discriminatory gender relationships and social norms limit rights to education.

Achieving gender equality is at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) agenda. SDG 5 (gender equality) explicitly targets key areas of inequality, and SDG 4 (education) outlines a number of gender equality-related targets. These targets are brought together in General Recommendation 36 by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, which sets out the ambition to achieve gender equality not only *in* but also *through* education.

Building on these targets and recommendation, 'Accountability for gender equality in education: Critical perspectives on an indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals' project (known as AGEE) is moving forward the debate around gender and girls' schooling by exploring what gender inequality and equality in education looks like, and how it can be measured.

The technique of measuring gender parity (the number of girls vs boys) does not sufficiently capture the range of relationships and values associated with the notion of gender equality in education, and what learning outcomes relating to gender equality might entail. Measuring gender parity tends to underplay a connection between education, women's rights, and social justice. Used alone, it is not a clear enough indicator of the relationships within and beyond education and therefore, what needs to be changed.

Through interviews and group discussions conducted in Malawi and South Africa and with representatives of key global organisations, and reviews of existing data sets, the research team is gathering data on laws and policies (whether or not these are put into practice); learning assessed through examinations, and other indications of attitudes; families' approach to organising work and managing budgets; teachers' attitudes; school-based gender violence, sexual harassment, and coercion; and lack of reproductive rights.

Drawing on conceptual work informed by the capability approach and reflections on the availability of data, the team is developing an alternative framework that captures a broader range of information on gender and education equality that looks beyond gender parity (i.e. girls as a proportion of boys). This includes information on:

- Gender and resources for education – including money, buildings, and staff;

- Constraints to converting resources into opportunities – for example, difficulties in implementing policies, distributing finance or understanding gender and other inequalities;
- Attitudes of teachers, parents and students on gender inequality/equality that affect schooling – for example, whether or not girls are required to do large amounts of childcare and domestic work, and if teachers assume that girls cannot do mathematics or science; and
- Gender outcomes of education (progression, learning outcomes) and beyond education – for example, political and cultural participation and connections with health, employment, earning, and leisure.

This nuanced approach to understanding and measuring gender inequality and equality forms an important contribution to the discussions on metrics under consideration for two targets (SDG 4.7 and SDG 4a) on education that have a focus on practices around gender equality.

The team hopes that this framework will build and enhance accountability between governments, NGOs, and the public with regard to work on gender equality in education, particularly with organisations engaging with the SDGs. The *Global Education Monitoring Report – Gender Report: Building Bridges for Gender Equality* (2019) used elements of this framework for its monitoring on gender equality in education, identifying six domains to develop better substantive measures of gender equality in education.

National statistical offices in Malawi and South Africa, academics, and activist organisations are reviewing the framework and looking at how it can be used to draw out key gender issues to inform more gender-responsive education sector planning. At the international level, in partnership with a team at the Global Education Monitoring Report, a framework has been developed to monitor gender equality across countries. This uses the national level dashboard, but also draws on data that are already routinely collected across countries.

Having this richer source of information on gender inequality and equality in education will help policymakers truly understand the multiple barriers that girls face in realising their right to go to school and learn. It will contribute to the building of education systems that take account of broader gendered barriers holding children back – especially girls – and identify strategies to address them, and then measure progress towards closing these critical gender gaps.



Project title: *Accountability for gender equality in education: Critical perspectives on an indicator framework for the Sustainable Development Goals.*

Professor Elaine Unterhalter

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BLOG POSTS:

Unterhalter, E.; Bella, N. and Davies, J. (2019) 'Making Gender Equality a Reality in Education: What Will it Take?', *Global Partnership for Education, Education for All Blog*, 6 March.

SEE ALSO:

Unterhalter, E. (2019) 'The Many Meanings of Quality Education: Politics of Targets and Indicators in SDG4', *Global Policy* 10.1: 39–51.

Unterhalter, E. (ed.) (2018) *Measuring the Unmeasurable in Education*, Abingdon: Taylor and Francis.

School, child marriage and early childbearing in rural Honduras

In Honduras, 34 per cent of girls are married before the age of 18, and 8 per cent are married before their fifteenth birthday (UNICEF). Child marriage can be devastating for girls' health and wellbeing. It denies them their childhood, their right to go to school and learn, to be independent, and exposes them to increased health problems and violence.

In some countries, research has shown that the longer a girl stays in school, the less likely she is to be married before the age of 18 and have children during her teenage years. However, in Central and Latin America, increased access to education has not resulted in a significant decrease in the rate of child marriage or early pregnancy, suggesting that expanding girls' access to schooling alone might not have a significant impact on the timing of early marriage and pregnancy.

Using data from a mixed-methods longitudinal study of adolescent girls, researchers from the University of California, Berkeley, and the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional Francisco Morazán, Honduras, have examined the relationship between schooling, child marriage, and early childbearing in rural Honduras.

In 2008, the research team began following 684 rural Honduran girls who were in their final year of primary school, and conducted indepth interviews with 24 of them at three time points over an eight-year period. The research collected from Sistema de Aprendizaje Tutorial (SAT) schools and Centros de Educación Básicos (CEB) schools found that only 8 per cent of girls returned to school after they had married.

The data identified a number of factors that influenced a girl's decision to leave school including:

- **A lack of interest in schooling** – along with economic pressures, researchers found that many students decided to leave school because they did not see the value of a secondary education. Despite being encouraged by parents and teachers, girls identified a lack of opportunities to further educational or economic opportunities due to structural limitations such as poverty and geographical isolation.
- **Exercising the right to marry** – girls did not always marry because they were forced, were pregnant or faced economic hardship; but rather, often as an expression of romantic desire. However, although girls reported entering unions willingly, researchers found that most girls reported regretting this decision.
- **The burden of motherhood** – many girls reported not feeling ready to become mothers, consistently describing a lack of knowledge of and/or successful use of contraception. In Honduras, discussion among family members about developmental changes involving biological changes, sexuality, and intimacy were described as taboo, and as a consequence, adolescents were often unprepared for these transitions.

Honduras has committed to eliminate child marriage by 2030 in line with SDG 5.3 and accordingly, the findings highlight several important policy considerations for:

- The continued need to provide financial assistance/cash transfers so that poverty does not prevent girls from completing secondary school;

SEE ALSO:

The Impact Initiative (ed.) (2018) *Quality Teaching*, ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice, Brighton: IDS.



Honduras: A girl writes on a blackboard in San Pedro Sula.

- Undertaking more research to understand why many girls lose interest in school, since after poverty this is the second most common reason for dropout; and
- Expanding opportunities for learning about gender and sexuality in schools so that girls (and boys) develop attitudes and practices that foster equitable relationships and prevent unplanned pregnancies.

In Honduras, the project team has closely engaged with government officials, including the Minister of Education, and with donors, to explore how to provide comprehensive sex education programmes in schools.

The findings have led to a new partnership between the researchers, the Bayan Association (a Honduran educational organisation), and the Honduran Ministry of Education. Using design-based research methodology, these groups have worked in partnership to develop an intervention called 'Addressing Child Marriage through Holistic Education' (ACMHE). In collaboration with students, parents and teachers, ACMHE aims to support the prevention of child marriage in rural areas by designing a culturally relevant curriculum. It has been implemented via textbooks (which include gender equality, puberty, and decision making processes exercises) for both students and parents as part of the mainstream curriculum in 21 secondary schools. In 2020, the research team plan to start a nationwide expansion of ACMHE in schools administered by the Bayan Association, which has a presence in 12 of the 18 administrative regions of Honduras.

In order to eliminate child marriage by 2030, the research team hope these findings will encourage policies and practices that promote gender equality and equip adolescents with the skills and information they need to take charge of their reproductive health and complete secondary school.



Project title: *Examining effective teaching in rural Honduran secondary schools.*

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Raising learning outcomes for girls in conflict-affected contexts

Quality education is of particular importance for children in Niger's south-eastern Diffa, a region affected by security threats and natural disasters: it can protect them against school dropout, child labour, and poverty. Schoolchildren in Diffa, particularly girls, often struggle with social-emotional and mental health problems that can hinder their learning and wellbeing. However, researchers from New York University have found that access to targeted social-emotional learning activities can be helpful and even more beneficial for girls than for boys in conflict-affected areas like Diffa.

During 2016–17, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) delivered its Learning in a Healing Classroom (Healing Classrooms) programme to bolster learning outcomes for and school retention of the students attending public schools in the Diffa region. Healing Classrooms provided remedial after-school tutoring sessions in addition to regular schooling, accompanied by teacher professional development and training in how to infuse social-emotional learning (SEL) principles into reading and mathematics teaching. In addition to Healing Classrooms tutoring, IRC provided low-cost targeted SEL programmes that could be incorporated into Healing Classroom programmes.

Researchers from Global TIES for Children at New York University conducted an experimental evaluation of the Healing Classrooms programme and the targeted SEL activities as part of the project, 'Promoting children's learning outcomes in conflict-affected countries: Evidence for action in Niger'. This project was designed to provide the first ever rigorous evidence of how non-formal, 'complementary' education programmes can support conflict-affected children's academic and social-emotional outcomes, and how it may impact girls' and boys' academic and social-emotional outcomes differently.

A total of 1,800 children from the 30 public schools in Diffa region were randomly selected to receive Healing Classrooms programming from the 4,994 second to fourth graders who are eligible for remedial education. The participating schools were then randomised to one of two conditions:

- 'Healing Classrooms Tutoring': students received six hours weekly of Healing Classrooms SEL-infused academic tutoring services for 22 weeks;
- 'Healing Classrooms Tutoring + Targeted SEL': students received six hours weekly of Healing Classrooms remedial services plus 11 weeks of mindfulness exercises, followed by 11 weeks of 'brain games' that used movement and playfulness to target core executive functioning skills.

The findings suggest that students who attended public schools and received the Healing Classroom remedial tutoring programmes demonstrated greater literacy and mathematics skills after 22 weeks of implementation compared to eligible students who attended the same public school but did not receive Healing Classrooms tutoring. In addition, they found the targeted SEL activities (mindfulness and brain games) improved students' school grades, but not reading and mathematics performance, over those involved only in Healing

Classrooms Tutoring. Healing Classrooms plus targeted SEL activities improved children's academic skills equally for both boys and girls.

The addition of targeted SEL programming, and mindfulness activities in particular, was found to be effective for children's social-emotional outcomes, particularly for girls. On average, students of both genders who had access to Healing Classrooms Tutoring plus mindfulness were less likely than students who only had access to Healing Classrooms Tutoring to report feelings of sadness or aggression in response to hypothetical social situations where such displays of emotion may not be appropriate. Importantly, girls benefited more from the mindfulness activities than boys; specifically, girls who had access to mindfulness activities were better able to regulate their sad emotions and aggressive impulses than boys in the same condition. In addition, accessing targeted SEL activities reduced girls' reports of school-related stress levels, while boys' stress levels remained the same regardless of whether they practised mindfulness activities or not. These findings suggest that the mindfulness activities, when accompanied by remedial tutoring programmes, potentially help children, and especially girls, to better adapt and adjust in social settings in schools and homes, leading to better academic and social-emotional development.

This study is not alone in finding gender differences for social-emotional intervention impacts, but there is currently little evidence as to why. Girls may be more aware of and reactive to their negative emotions and more susceptible than boys to internalising stress; a mindfulness approach, which emphasises non-judgmental awareness and regulation of feelings, may therefore allow girls to be more aware of and less reactive to their negative emotions. Alternatively, different developmental trajectories of boys and girls may affect the appeal and/or suitability of the intervention.

The findings demonstrate that targeted SEL results appear to be particularly robust for girls, who are at higher risk of poor schooling and mental health outcomes. The research provides evidence that quality non-formal learning opportunities, such as remedial tutoring programmes, can complement the formal education system in a conflict-affected country like Niger by supporting children's schooling and learning outcomes.

The project has significantly strengthened awareness that teacher training and curricular programmes should consider adding targeted and affordable SEL strategies to promote learning and wellbeing in conflict-affected countries.



Project title: *Promoting children's learning outcomes in conflict-affected countries: Evidence for action in Niger.*

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New York University, USA

Lindsay Brown

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Ha Yeon Kim

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SEE ALSO:

Education in Emergencies: Evidence for Action (3EA) (2017) IRC Healing Classrooms Retention Support Programming Improves Syrian Refugee Children's Learning In Lebanon, Impact Report 1.1

Education in Emergencies: Evidence for Action (3EA) (2019) IRC Healing Classrooms Remedial Tutoring Programming Improves Nigerien and Nigerian Children's Learning, Impact Report 2.1

Series of Research for Policy and Practice papers

Impact Initiative Research for Policy and Practice papers provide key messages and research evidence for policymakers, practitioners, NGOs, and others engaged in development policy and practice. These collections of research provide direct insights into how projects enabled by the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership demonstrate the depth and breadth of research impact in key areas including: disability, gender, education, social protection, teaching, and urban resilience.

Disability and education

Bringing together examples of crosscutting work on disability and education, this collection provides valuable new evidence on what governments must consider to ensure that children with disabilities benefit from quality education without discrimination or exclusion. It highlights the value of a study led by deaf researchers in India; explores school-readiness in Malawi; offers greater understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by children with disabilities within the classroom across six countries; and advances strategies on how to support the learning and teaching of children facing multiple disadvantages, including disabilities, in India and Pakistan.

Read/download pdf: <https://bit.ly/2mmmq0z>

ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice: Disability and education

Foreword

Sustainable Development Goal 4 aims to ensure that no one is left behind in education. Having been completed out of the Millennium Development Goals, disability inclusion is now a key focus for a disability inclusion framework – creating an increasingly ambitious research-to-action agenda.

Despite efforts by governments, policymakers, and practitioners to ensure inclusive quality education for all, persons with disabilities continue to be one of the primary causes of educational exclusion. We think that it is not just the children with disabilities who are more likely to drop out of education and that methods may support their learning outcomes.

Disability rights activists, engaged in research-based evidence to these advances and influence education policies to develop effective responses. The most research on this subject will be disability based and not the other way around. A foundation for higher learning and employment. We need research and development of policies and practices that will be the knowledge gain.

This collection of ESRC-DFID funded research provides valuable evidence on what governments must consider in order to ensure that children with disabilities benefit from quality education without discrimination or exclusion. This research understands teaching, globally relevant and contextualized evidence of how the education sector can play a role in supporting children with disabilities. It highlights the value of a study led by deaf researchers in India, exploring school-readiness in Malawi, offers greater understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by children with disabilities within the classroom across six countries, and advances strategies on how to support the learning and teaching of children facing multiple disadvantages, including disabilities, in India and Pakistan.

Collectively, the research highlights how to ensure suitable tools to identify children with disabilities in national surveys so that can be planning with existing agencies for better and inclusive work. The research should be presented by all disability stakeholders and not by all persons aiming to implement Sustainable Development Goal 4.

However, we still need to learn and understand more. The World Bank and other development partners should be more likely to support research to address the needs of children with disabilities and other forms of disadvantage. It is well documented and how to ensure that children with disabilities are not left behind. Research and necessary skills. As the clock ticks towards 2030, evidence is needed to ensure that children with disabilities are not left behind to the needs of all girls and boys who are often behind in learning to the needs of all learners.

Shirley Hone
Head of Education Policy
UKaid International Trust

Key messages

- A global evidence-based approach to teaching with children with disabilities and disabilities – including people with disabilities in research partners.
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Quality teaching

This collection explores the process of teaching and the factors that make good quality teaching. Drawing on evidence across three continents, it highlights innovative teacher training and recruitment approaches that are improving learning outcomes in Honduras; a classroom observation tool that has improved teaching in Uganda; how Professional Learning Communities can improve teaching quality in China; and the way that transforming teaching quality through active learning is having an impact in Ethiopia.

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Photo: Adam Dean/Panos Pictures

ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice: Quality teaching

Foreword

Teachers are crucial in achieving the education to be available for all. Quality teaching is the key to ensuring that all children can benefit from education. Quality teaching is the key to ensuring that all children can benefit from education. Quality teaching is the key to ensuring that all children can benefit from education.

However, the process of teaching – and what truly makes a good quality – remains something of a black box to both academics and practitioners. This collection of research explores the process of teaching, globally relevant and contextualized evidence of how the education sector can play a role in supporting children with disabilities. It highlights the value of a study led by deaf researchers in India, exploring school-readiness in Malawi, offers greater understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by children with disabilities within the classroom across six countries, and advances strategies on how to support the learning and teaching of children facing multiple disadvantages, including disabilities, in India and Pakistan.

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Key messages

- Provide new teachers with well-structured induction programmes to support their teaching.
- Offer teacher development as continuous, ongoing, teacher-led with opportunities, support and feedback to enhance learning.
- Use classroom observation to feedback teachers on their teaching and offer advice on further improvement.
- Adapt an existing active learning tool to support teaching and learning in the classroom.

Women's life choices

This collection identifies the critical elements that need addressing if women's and girls' lives are to change for the better. It explores mobility constraints experienced by girls and how lack of transport options hamper their access to paid work, health services, and schooling; looks at the barriers that women face regarding lifesaving diagnostic treatment and maternal health-care services; and highlights the role of education systems in enhancing women's economic opportunities. The collection draws on research from Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Lesotho, Laos, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, and Yemen.

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ESRC-DFID Research for Policy and Practice: Women's life choices

Foreword

Women contribute extensively to economies, whether by doing unpaid domestic work, agricultural work, or participating in the labour force. They often face tremendous challenges in doing so, from lack of access to services, to gender inequality, to violence against women and girls. They are subject to violence and discrimination, and face barriers to health care, education, and employment. This collection of research provides valuable evidence on what governments must consider in order to ensure that women and girls benefit from quality education without discrimination or exclusion. This research understands teaching, globally relevant and contextualized evidence of how the education sector can play a role in supporting children with disabilities. It highlights the value of a study led by deaf researchers in India, exploring school-readiness in Malawi, offers greater understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by children with disabilities within the classroom across six countries, and advances strategies on how to support the learning and teaching of children facing multiple disadvantages, including disabilities, in India and Pakistan.

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Women, work and social protection

This collection explores the need for a holistic approach to social protection that moves beyond a framing of poverty alleviation being primarily about access to the traditional labour market and cash transfers, to one that encompasses a broader range of considerations. It draws on research from Bangladesh, Malawi, Lesotho, South Africa, and Rwanda.

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THE IMPACT INITIATIVE

For International Development Research

This summary highlights the key messages from research focusing on gender and education from the ESRC-DFID Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme, and is an output of the Impact Initiative for International Development Research.

It is written in collaboration with research teams and edited by Elizabeth Tofaris, the Impact Initiative Communications Specialist based at the REAL Centre, Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.

The Impact Initiative seeks to connect policymakers and practitioners with the world-class social science research supported by the ESRC-DFID Strategic Partnership, maximising the uptake and impact of research from: (i) the Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation Research; and (ii) the Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Research Programme. We seek to identify synergies between these programmes and their grant-holders, support them to exploit influencing and engagement opportunities and facilitate mutual learning. The Impact Initiative is a collaboration between the Institute of Development Studies and the University of Cambridge's Research for Equitable Access and Learning (REAL) Centre.

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Joint Fund for Poverty Alleviation: aims to enhance the quality and impact of social science research, addressing the key international development goal of reducing poverty amongst the poorest countries and peoples of the world.



Raising Learning Outcomes in Education Systems Programme: aims to provide policymakers and practitioners with concrete ideas on how to improve learning outcomes and to inform relevant policy and programme decision.



Research jointly supported by the ESRC and DFID