

GENDER INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Education is a critical factor in achieving social equality, including gender equality. For this reason, ensuring equality in the provision of education should not only be a social priority but something natural and obvious. This topic was the subject of considerable debate among scholars for many decades. The beginnings of the struggle for equality of women are based primarily on the battle for access to education, which was essential in this regard. Therefore the gender education gap is decreasing, and nowadays, contemporary rarely persists in educated countries. As a result of the struggle of feminists, today, women around the Globe are more educated than at any point in history. Nevertheless, the phenomena such as “gender inequality” or “gender gap” understood more broadly than education, are still relevant problems. Thereby, men are still more educated and privileged. The problem is not only the degree of accessibility to education but also its content. Yet, current gender inequality is the result of super imposed stereotypical patterns, as well as prejudices and discriminations embodied in the system.

This article was written to introduce the issue of gender inequality in education. The given research problem in this study is as follows: where do gender inequalities in education become apparent? The aim of the study is to overview the current state of knowledge. Exploring this topic is crucial because this phenomenon has many negative consequences. This article aims to present the initial characteristics of the problem and draw attention to the issue. The method used is a literature review.

Keywords: *education, gender discrimination, gender equality, gender gap, gender inequality.*

Introduction

Gender inequality of education prevents girls and boys, women and men from ensuring the basic human right to education. This phenomenon is a serious problem, both locally, nationally and internationally. Moreover, it has been a major challenge over past years and the struggle connected with it continues nowadays. Its influence not only affects the lives of individuals but also inhibits the development of the whole society and thus harms economic growth. Depending on the place of occurrence, it can take various forms.

This topic is note worthy because it is a broad, complex and dynamic process. It consists of multiple levels. The first is access to education, which, despite the significant improvement, remains a considerable issue. This is confirmed by the latest UNESCO data, which shows that 132 million girls worldwide do not have access to schools (UNESCO, 2021). Causes include, but are not limited to, cultural norms and practices, school-related gender-based violence or even home to school distance.

This article aims to present the initial characteristics of the problem of gender inequality in education and draw attention to the social debate about it. The research subject of this study, which is gender inequality in education, is extremely important. The significance can be demonstrated at different levels. It is necessary to start with a broader concept which is gender equality. It leads to one of the fundamental legal principles – The right to equality and freedom from discrimination. It is an essential element of democracy and an imperative of social justice. It preaches that every human being has the inborn right to enjoy their human rights on an equal basis with other individuals and to lead a life free from discrimination.

The seriousness of the topic follows also the fact that gender equality allows providing equal opportunities for education and employment. From a social perspective gender inequality, as well as other types of equalities, harms the individuals as well as the commonality. It can stimulate economic growth, which is important, especially in countries with higher unemployment rates and fewer economic opportunities.

Moreover, Global Partnership for Education [GPE] understands achieving gender equality as delivering on three interlinked areas for girls: health, education and safety (Brief, 2019). This leads to the second of the discussed elements – education. It is a process of acquiring knowledge and pieces of information. The results are advantages such as good careers and social status. Also, it can influence self-confidence and a successful future. It is the main factor standing behind the success of developed countries (Al-Shuaibi, 2014). Therefore, educating generates great benefits not only for gender equality but also public health, economic prosperity and lasting peace and stability (UNESCO, 2021).The relationship between education and health was also examined. It has been documented that higher levels of education generally relate to better health, less psychological distress, and fewer depressive symptoms of those with less education (Ross & Mirowsky, 2006). They have also been presented studies that analyze the impact of education on the role of fertility (Nations & Fund, 2004).

The reason why access is important is shown by the data provided by GPE (2021). According to their research maternal deaths would decline by two-thirds, if every girl completed primary school. If every girl received 12 years of schooling, child marriage could plunge by two-thirds.

Furthermore, girls' higher lifetime earnings would grow economies by as much as \$ 30 trillion. For every additional year of schooling girls receive, their country's resilience to climate disasters improves and their earnings can increase by 10% to 20%. Women's Education also affects the fate of her family, for example, a child whose mother has the ability to read is 50% more likely to live past the age of 5. Furthermore, this child is twice as likely to go to school and 50% more likely to be immunized.

The combination of these two issues can be considered the third aspect of the links discussed above. It should be taken into consideration that it is a complex overlapping process. Gender equality brings about equality in education and education brings about gender equality.

Method

The research subject of this work is the phenomenon of gender inequality in education. The method used in this article was a literature review. It allowed answering the given research problem, which reads as follows: where do gender inequalities in education become apparent? The study aims to overview the current state of knowledge.

The research was divided into stages. The first one was to specify the basic concepts and find their definitions. They include gender inequality in education, gender inequality, gender equality, gender discrimination, the gender gap in education.

After studying the concepts and their definitions, the focus was on the literature that characterizes this phenomenon. Size and symptoms were recognized. In the end, the literature that justifies the importance of the topic and how to prevent them were read. The following search engines were used: Google scholar, Springer, EBSCO, Mendeley.

Results

Due to the enormous number of search results that were impossible to parse, it was necessary to narrow down the search area. To do so, as well as to ensure timeliness of the data, it was decided to narrow the position to the past 20 years. Nevertheless, one of the oldest of the analyzed items is from 2004. At the same time, in order to obtain objective and up-to-date data, numerous reports available on the organisation's websites were used. The following number of reports was included in the analysis: UNESCO – 2, Save the Children – 1, Global Partnership for Education – 3, World Bank – 1, UNICEF South Asia.- 1. Although it was decided to analyze current articles, at the same time articles focusing on the COVID-19 the amtics were consciously omitted. In addition, the analysis began with

four pieces, in the Polish literature, which were in the possession of the author, as well as with the encyclopedia of adolescence. As a result of the review, 1 item from the Springer search engines was analyzed, 1 item from Researchgate and one from SAGE. The rest of the works were found with EBSCO, Mendeley and Google Scholar. The analysis consisted of finding the most thematically related articles. The first stage was to select the pieces by referring to the titles of the articles. When the title seemed to be an adjunct, the key words were read, followed by the abstract. If any of these categories was consistent with the research topic, a reading was attempted followed by an analysis of the pieces.

The analysis showed that the problem of *gender inequality* in education was discussed in the literature empirically researched, nevertheless, few definitions are describing this phenomenon in the literature. It can be found on the websites and in the reports covering this issue. The European Institute for Gender Equality provides the following definition: “*Legal, social and cultural situation in which sex and/or gender determine different rights and dignity for women and men, which are reflected in their unequal access to enjoyment of rights, as well as the assumption of stereotyped social and cultural roles.*” (The European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2021). Another definition describes it as “*allowing people different opportunities due to perceive differences based solely on issues of gender. Gender discrimination is the prejudicial treatment of an individual or group due to gender. Gender inequality and discrimination are generally discussed as pertaining to women, but anyone can experience gender-based inequality or discrimination.*” (Parziale, 2008).

Each of these definitions refers directly or indirectly to the notion of discrimination, therefore it is of most importance to clarify its meaning. According to Article 1 Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women,⁷ of United Nations, 1979. Gender discrimination is understood as: “*Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field*” (UNICEF, 2017). For a comparison of definitions, it is worth taking a closer look at the words of Salvini, who says that: “*gender discrimination refers to any situation where a person is denied an opportunity or misjudged solely on the basis of their sex. Gender discrimination is any unequal treatment based on gender and may also be referred to as sexism. Gender discrimination occurs when a person shows a prejudice towards another that would not occur had they been the opposite sex.*” (Salvini, 2014).

The analyses of inequality in the context of education is an important area because it plays a major role in the life of every human being.

Sadly, inequality in this area has led to the gender gap, which according to UNESCO is defined as *“Disproportionate difference between men and women and boys and girls, particularly as reflected in attainment of development goals, access to resources and levels of participation. A gender gap indicates gender inequality.”* (UNICEF, 2017).

UNESCO (2017) does not present the definition of gender inequality, nevertheless, there is much information about gender equality available. The concept is described as equal conditions, treatment and opportunities for realizing the full potential, human rights and dignity for both genders and sexes. Girls and boys should contribute, as well benefit from economic, social, cultural and political development. Therefore, this concept is understood as being full-fledged partners at home, in the community and society. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that rights, their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on the gender roles they play.

The phenomenon of gender inequality is large-scaled and ubiquitous. Despite significant gains in recent years, education outcomes for girls in developing countries continue to lag behind those of boys. According to GPE in the year 2002, an estimated 129 million girls worldwide remain out of school (GPE). Similar data were presented in 2018 when these numbers reached 129.2 million girls (UNESCO, 2019). According to current UNESCO data, this number has risen to 132 million. This includes 34.3 million girls in primary school age, 30 million girls of lower-secondary school age, and 67.4 million of upper-secondary school age (The World Bank, 2021). All those girls face multiple barriers, which may have different backgrounds causes include, but are not limited to poverty, cultural norms and practices, traditional status role.

The girls are under pressure from social norms and cultural practices, which places new restrictions on them. It influences what they can do and who they are. As a result, adolescence is for many girls in developing countries, a time of extreme vulnerability. These girls are at risk of sexual violence, childmarriage, teenage pregnancy. The risk of HIV infection and AIDS, as well as nutritional deficiency also increases (Brief, 2019).

Lack of access to education is more frequent when the safety and security of the household are compromised (GPE, 2021) This shows the fact that in countries affected by conflict, there is a higher risk for girls to be out of school. It is twice as likely for girls living in non-affected countries (The World Bank, 2021).

Currently, the coronavirus pandemic situation in the world is not without significance. Current research shows that due to school closures and a lack of access to remote learning children lost an average of 74 school-days, which equals more than one-third of education of the standard global

190-day school year (Save the Children, 2021). Moreover, as of March 2021, world wide almost half the world's students are out of school due to school closures (UNESCO, 2020).

Nowadays, you hear about the phenomenon of the reverse gender gap, which was commonly viewed as a lack of access to education for women. Nowadays, it is more and more often said that the situation has changed (Barone & Assirelli, 2020; Delaruelle et al., 2018; Klesment & Van Bavel, 2017). The origins of this phenomenon are not fully understood, for this reason, some studies contribute to a better understanding of the forces behind this reversal (Bossavie & Kanninen, 2018). This statement is especially true in higher education (Barone & Assirelli, 2020). The very phenomenon of reversing the gender gap, however, takes place in developed countries, where men's access to education is also very high. Interesting research in this area has been carried out by Evans with colleagues (2021). Examined were fifty years of data to identify key trends in girls education. Data from 1960 to 2010 and about 126 countries was used excluding "all (mostly high-income) countries that were founding members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development" (Evans et al., 2021)

Among the countries surveyed, only five adult women had one more year of education than adult men in the year 2010. Even though women are more educated today than they did fifty years ago, women are still not as educated as men. In addition, it was noticed in the analysis that during this time access to education grew in countries where general access to education was increasing. They report that nowadays, the problem of gender gaps rarely persist in educated countries. Size able gender gap tend to be in those countries in which boys are getting a low level of education. Unfortunately, despite the increases in female schooling, the reversal of the gender gap in education does not necessarily lead to a reversal of the gender earnings gap (Klesment & Van Bavel, 2017).

The gender gap is not only about quantity but also quality. Despite greater access to education, there are traces of inequality in classrooms. A gender-stereotypical approach is noticeable, from kindergarten to higher education (Zajęzkowska, 2008). Sexual stereotyping involves associating girls and boys with separate and often opposing traits.

Stereotypes may result from cultural norms and be manifested in the teachers' behaviour and practices. They may also be included in textbooks and contain stories and images that reflect the stereotypical roles and activities (Łukasik, 2021). As a result, stereotypical lines of thought are validated, which may affect the assimilation and adaptation of children. This may affect children beliefs and attitudes toward achievements.

A good example is a division into girls and boys in physical education classes. Which often humiliates girls and affect their self-esteem

(Zajęzkowska, 2008). Comparable is the practice of neglecting boys during language or art classes or having lower requirements for girls in physics or mathematics classes. Doing so leads to inadequate self-esteem and may not have profound consequences in the future.

Research shows that girls' and boys' academic performance is not very different. For example, the results show that girls had better reading scores in all participating countries, but that the gender differences in mathematics were much smaller. The smallest difference in reading was found in Argentina, Chile, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Panama, and Peru, while the greatest gaps were recorded in Finland, Jordan, the Republic of North Macedonia, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (Clarke & Luna-Bazaldúa, 2021). However, it should be said that not only gender affects learning outcomes, for example, but socioeconomic status is also a great factor in understanding academic achievement (Brown & Prinstein, 2011).

An example of such inequality can be Polish schools. Research shows that gender diversification is visible in Polish education (Zajęzkowska, 2008). Equal access to education is also hindered by measures limiting the admission of candidates of a given gender to selected fields of study in some schools and high schools. Consequently, it has led to rejections in the recruitment process of girls. This has been reported in some prestigious high schools as well as police and military schools. There has been a case of higher military schools, did not recruit women at all.

However, there is an assumption that gender-related variations in the academic achievement of girls and boys are strongly related to the kinds of their future occupations, which may perpetuate the gender-specific division of labour in adulthood (Brown & Prinstein, 2011). Although women are strongly overrepresented in the humanities and the social sciences, they are continually underrepresented in STEM fields, such as engineering, computing, technology, physics or mathematics. Therefore, it is extremely important to introduce preventive methods toward gender equality in the United States and other Western nations (Brown & Prinstein, 2011)

It can not be denied that education in modern societies is an important part of the problem of gender inequality. If we will not provide everyone with equal access to education, it's impossible to obtain equal access to particular professions, funds and prestige (Gromkowska-Melosik, 2011).

Discussion

After analyzing the literature, it can be concluded that although the topic is often discussed in the literature, the definition of the phenomenon is rare. Defining is more often undertaken by institutions working in this

area. The definitions often follow other key concepts such as gender gap or gender discrimination. However, it was not possible to find a publication, which had analyzed the definitions.

This work responds to the research problem set at the outset, by showing that gender inequalities in education become especially apparent in the following situations. First of all, inequality is dramatic when it comes to access to education. This does not apply to all countries. As research shows, there is a phenomenon called the reverse gender gap. According to Evans with colleagues (2021) research, however, this is not as common a phenomenon as it might seem. It is also problematic that despite increased access to education, and sometimes better remuneration for boys, women still have a more difficult situation in the labour market and earn less than men.

Secondly, this phenomenon has negative consequences resulting from stereotypical treatment. They can even be psychological consequences such as lowered self-esteem. The study provides new insight into the relationship between gender and higher education. It shows that there is still discriminatory behaviour towards girls.

Furthermore, this research illustrates the large size of the problem, but also raises the question of the truescale. The intricacy and complexity of the phenomenon makes it difficult to provide data on the true size of the whole problem.

The limitations of this work result from the omission of the employment situation among teachers. Although there are publications that include the problem of the proportion of employment they have taught, this publication has deliberately omitted it. This issue was raised in the work of Zajączkowska (2008) and concerned the situation in Poland. Further research is required to establish whether gender discrimination among educators is a global issue and what are its connections with discrimination resulting from the stereotypical treatment of students and their interests.

The conclusion resulting from this work, which is worth remembering is the fact that gender inequality in education is not just a symptom, but also a cause of gender inequality.

Conclusions

This literature review has found that gender inequality in education is still a relevant problem. It is known to be on a large scale and is a complex phenomenon. Due to its different calculations, it is difficult to quantify its size. Figures concerning the lack of access to education have been quoted, but the analysis carried out revealed that this phenomenon is not limited to this aspect.

Furthermore, this article has allowed us to answer where gender inequalities in education become apparent. It has demonstrated the fact that due to its complex character, therefore various forms are distinguished. The answer to the research question showed the diversity of the phenomenon. Regardless of the type, the most important thing to remember is that education is the most powerful protective factor. Moreover, it is the way to empower girls and boys. Giving children the opportunity of education can determine their destiny.

For this purpose, it is necessary not only to focus on the access of education it self but also it's quality. It is important to bring about an appropriate environment where schools respect both genders and lead to the equal valuing of the similarities and the differences. Some of the preventive recommendations should focus on neutralizing textbooks and content made available at school by sensitizing teachers' attention to their behaviour, lifting limits on schools and faculties, by convincing girls and boys to interdisciplinarity

Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men must be recognized and treated equally. Therefore, there is the need for in-depth exploration of the topic which is gender inequality in education and combating it. It is also crucial to develop precise preventive recommendations in the future.

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