

State of Female Education in Global South: An Invisible Gap with Palpable Socio-Economic and Public Health Consequences

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Abstract

This paper critically reviewed the state of female education (FE) across Global South Nations (GSNs) and its socio-economic and public health consequences. Desk research approach was employed for generation of data for the study. Therefore, this paper built on the findings of previous studies on the subject published in reputable journals and websites. Results show that: in Arab countries, low social value is placed on girls' education, and majority out of school children are girls; in Latin America and the Caribbean, girls have lower average years of education, limited chances of completing secondary education, fewer opportunities for university education as well as resultant higher illiteracy rates, although contrary reports were found in country like Bahamas; in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Soviet regime leveled the gender inequalities in access to education but there remains pockets of gender inequalities regarding enrolment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic; in Asia and the Pacific, gender inequality regarding access to quality education has been diminished in Bhutan but not in Antarctica, Bangladesh, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea where hero factor and masculinity impedes FE; and in Africa, girls are at disadvantage especially in Nigeria where majority of out-of-school children are girls. It was concluded that FE is highly undermined in GSNs, and painfully, the females themselves have resigned to fate that women subordination and deprivation in the scheme of things are not only normal but also justifiable. Among other things, the study recommended that the government of the GSNs should place priority in investing in education with more emphasis on girl child.

Keywords: Female Education, Global South, Gender Inequality

Introduction

The words of Mahatma Gandhi as emphasized in Aherkar and Poojari (2014), "if you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate an entire family" goes to show that the dividends of female education are not confined within the individual recipient of education but extend to their entire families. Female education offers women opportunities for acquisition of lifelong competences and skills for navigating the

challenging world (Aliu, 2001). It increases women's sense of worth and capabilities. As a result, educated females are less vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases, human trafficking, child marriage, as well as all forms of violence and abuse (United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking cited in Stepp, 2016; Cram, 2020). In their families, they are more likely to (i) promote healthy behaviours (ii), participate in decision-making in households, and (iii) engage in better jobs with greater incomes which is a necessity for breaking patterns of poverty and hunger in families (Cram 2020; Theirworld, 2021). In service to the society, educated women are more likely to (i) be politically aware and more confident in their ability to lead, (ii) take leadership positions in civil service, (iii), and participate in local, state and national assignments and policy making, and (iv) less likely to support or promote violence and terrorism (Sundholm, 2011; United Nations, Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2017; Muslim Aid, 2020). Overall, FE has been acknowledged as one of the best options for reversing the ever rising trend of violence, crises, poverty, hunger and disease common in poor regions (Aliu, 2001; Nussbaum, 2003; Stepp, 2016; India Today, 2020).

Despite the widely acknowledged unmatched importance of FE in promoting the health, sustainability and progress of all nations, it continues to suffer setbacks mainly in the poor and middle income countries, which are now known as Global South Nations (GSNs). Some factors such as patriarchal norm, masculinity, hero factor and traditional gender role in GSNs often place the females in bearing the brunt of household chores and caregiver (Ferdaush & Rahman, 2011; World Bank Group, 2016; Nash, Nielsen, Shaw, King, Lea & Bax, 2019). For instance, when funding of children's education becomes difficult, the parents prefer to withdraw the girls from schooling and allow the boys to continue (Millennium Challenge Account Georgia, 2014), whereas the females are to stay at home and carry out domestic works or enter into early marriage to be able to raise money to support the education of boys (World Bank Group, 2016; GECG & UNDP, 2018; Cline, 2018). More troubling is the fact that the females themselves have come to accept that women subordination and deprivation are normal and justifiable (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017; Ugwu, 2021).

Therefore, this gap will remain perpetually invisible if not exposed and addressed, and it would be difficult to achieve the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. In consequence, illiteracy, poverty, hunger, poor health outcomes, inequalities inter alia would continue to be widespread among GSNs.

If the GSNs could realize that their common problems are fueled by inequalities, and if they could work in collaboration in dealing with them, their poor health outcomes, illiteracy, poverty and hunger will be diminished (Yi, 2020; Syed, Dadwal, & Rutter, 2017). Therefore, one way of awakening the governments of the GSNs to realize the state of female education in their countries is through research that lays bare this hidden gap and its consequences. This may prompt the governments of the GSNs to collaborate in formulating strategies and policies for addressing this common problem. Therefore, a study that will expose the state of FE across GSNs is grossly needed. Almost all studies available in literature focused on either on local, national or at best, regional state of female education. No single study has permeated the GSNs with a view to projecting the state of female education among the GSNs. Hence, the purpose of this paper to examine the state of female education across the GSNs and the accompanying consequences.

Literature Review

State of FE in Arab countries.

The females in Arab countries tend to have limited access to education compared with their counterparts. In a study conducted by Steer, Ghanem and Jalbout (2014), it was reported that despite better performance of females in education compared to the males, they are much less likely to have educational opportunities than their male counterpart. The report further indicated that of about 8.6 million out-of-school children in Arab countries, 5 million of them are poor girls living in rural regions. These disparities are more conspicuous in Yemen where less than 1 per cent of males lack access to education, compared with 86 per cent of females (Steer, Ghanem, & Jalbout, 2014). In Somalia, the females are to stay at home and carryout domestic works and majority of female jobs outside home (like tending to livestock or milking animals) do not require an education (Cline, 2018). In Djibouti, low social value is placed on girls' education, and those from the rural and poorest households are among the most deprived (UNICEF, 2017). These findings seem to be uniform across GSNs in Arab world because similar findings have been reported of Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia and several other countries in the region (El-Sanabiy, 1989).

State of FE in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), the girls have lower average years of education, limited chances of completing secondary education, fewer opportunities for university education and resultant higher illiteracy rates compared with males (Díaz & Fernández, 2017). UNESCO (2014) reported that there exists disparity against women in

access to primary education particularly in Dominican Republic, Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and against men only in the Bahamas. As it concerns access to secondary education, the report shows that males are disadvantaged. Only 2 out of 23 countries registered disparity against females, while disparity against males was observed in 13 out of 23 countries. This finding is unique and the reason is that men prefer entering the labour market early at the expense of their secondary education (ILO, 2012 in UNESCO, 2014).

State of FE in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Unlike in GSNs of other regions, the Soviet regime leveled the gender inequalities in access to education and formal jobs in Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECA). As a result, the rates of female enrolment in education and labour force can be compared to those seen in advanced and high-income countries (World Bank, 2014). However, there are still pockets of gender inequalities regarding enrolment in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematic) courses with male taking the lead particularly in Armenia and Belarus (World Economic Forum, 2015; Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017; Tashlykova-Bushkevich, 2019). In Ukraine, women and girls living in the rural setting face discrimination in access to education and other basic services (UNICEF, 2018). For instance, 67 per cent of rural women, unlike their urban counterparts, do not have access to internet at home (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2015). In Georgia, there is gender parity in school enrollment rates at both primary and secondary levels (UNICEF, 2011). However, about 25 per cent of children who missed primary school were those from disadvantaged and marginalized groups (Gender Equality Council of Georgia [GECG] & UNDP, 2018). Studies show that due to patriarchal norms in some communities in Georgia, the girls leave schooling for marriage as early as age 13 because there is less emphasis in their education (World Bank Group, 2016; GECG & UNDP, 2018). For instance, if parents cannot afford cost of education of all their children, they would prefer to withdraw the girls for the boys to continue (Millennium Challenge Account Georgia, 2014).

State of FE in Asia and the Pacific.

Most countries of Asia and Pacific have recorded substantial progress in diminishing gender inequality regarding access to quality education (Evans, Akmal, & Jakiela, 2019). Bhutan is very good example in this instance. In 1970, only 2 girls were enrolled for every 100 boys that enrolled in primary school in Bhutan (World Bank, 2013), but as at 2013, about 101 girls were enrolled for every 100 boys (Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of

Education, Bhutan, 2013). Bhutan's secret of becoming a champion in girls' education include among other things, free basic education and extension of primary schools to almost all the villages to enhance enrolments even in rural settings (Tshering, 2014). However, due to hero factor, masculinity and belief in male superiority, gender inequality in access to education was observed in Antarctica (Nash, Nielsen, Shaw, King, Lea, & Bax, 2019), Bangladesh (Ferdaush & Rahman, 2011), and especially in Cambodia as well as Papua New Guinea (Evans, Akmal, & Jakiela, 2019). Although Cambodia's Constitution guaranteed universal access to basic education, there remains a sheer mismatch between this legal framework and situation on ground. This is because, being a female has strong connection with poor access to education in Cambodia (FAO, IFAD & ILO, 2010; Chantum, n.d.; Edwards, 2015; UNICEF, 2018). Similarly, Papua New Guinea is a patriarchal society and women's education remains unvalued.

State of FE in African countries.

Africa seems to be one of the worst places when considering inequalities that impinge on access to quality education. Different authors have continued to advance various reasons why Africa is a fertile ground for gender disparity against women in education. Across African countries, religious and cultural practices, poverty, political instability, civil unrest, diseases, child marriage, girls' involvement in family responsibilities, social exclusion and cost of education combine to deny the girl-child her right to education (Mwangi, 2004; Offorma, 2004; DFID, 2005; Tyoakaa, Amaka, & Nor, 2014; Ugwu, 2021). These factors are not exhaustive and they have kept millions of girls out of school. In consequence, there have been imbalance in access to education in Africa and girls are at disadvantage. The effects are worse for the poor, rural and socially excluded girls (British Council, 2014). For instance, in Burkina Faso more of women (78%) compared with men (63%) can neither read nor write (FAO, IFAD, & ILO, 2010). In Rwanda, gender parity has only been attained in primary education, but boys are more likely than girls to carry on their education through higher levels (USAID, 2014). This accounts for why the population of male graduates (68.9%) was more than twice of their female counterparts which was 31.1 per cent in the university graduation rate (Tusiime, Otara, Kaleeba, Kaviira, & Tsinda, 2017). In Nigeria, of the population of people who have never attended school, 40 per cent are women while 28per cent are men (Nigerian National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2009). Nigeria has the highest number of out-of-school children in the world and majority of them are the poor, rural girls (British Council, 2014).

FE and the inception of ICT as pedagogical tool.

Even as the world is gradually dumping the brick and mortar approaches to teaching and learning, the present researchers were concerned that these existing inequalities might constitute obstacles in current bid to shift virtual learning. This is because, gender and the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) interact in so many ways including: (1) gender and ICT skill, (2) gender and access to internet, and (3) gender and possession of computer, phones or other internet-enabled devices.

There is a strong connection between gender and ICT skills. For instance, in an ICT competency test, girls were reported to be less competent in the use of computer than boys (Jackson, Ervin, Gardner & Schmitt, 2001). In a similar study, Ramayah and Osman (2005) found that male users were more skillful in computer operation compared with female users. Furthermore, males are more skilled with the use of various computer applications than their female counterparts (Bimber, 2000). These findings may be attributed to the fact that generally, males exhibit greater scientific and technological know-how than do females (Hayes 2001).

Considering gender connection with access to the internet, males were found to use internet more often than do females around the world (Khokhar, 2017). For instance, in 2019 global report of internet access based on gender by Clement (2021), it was found that: more males than females access internet in Africa (37.1% males; 20.2% females), in Commonwealth Independent States (74% males; 71.7% females), in Europe (85.1% males; 80.1% females), in Arab States (61.3% males; 47.3% females), and in Asia Pacific (48.3% males; 41.3 females). It was only in the Americas that females had more internet access than males (76.3% males; 77% females). Nevertheless, numerous findings (Idowu, Adagunodo, & Idowu 2004; Ramayah & Osman, 2005; Kay, 2006) have supported the fact that male students were more likely to use e-resources than female students. In terms of possession of computer or other internet-enable devices, boys have been more often reported to have their personal computers than do girls (Sjöberg, 2002). In a similar study, Blumenstock and Eagle (2010) found that males are more likely to own and lend phones than do females.

The foregoing has shown that females in GSNs have been shortchanged with respect to access to quality education. This, if not addressed, would continue to create societies with unequal opportunities and this undermines most of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. This

Consequences of Undermining Female Education

The consequences of poor/ lack of access to education by the females are three pronged, namely: consequences on the woman; her family; and the society.

The undesirable consequences of lack of education remain evident all through a woman's life. An uneducated girl/woman is more likely to make poor health decisions and engage in unhealthy behaviours like unprotected sex and poor nutrition choice; more likely to have more children; and more likely to suffer emotional and psychological health issues (Nussbaum, 2003; Stepp, 2016; World Bank, 2018; India Today, 2020). Uneducated girls are more likely to enter early marriages and have more children compared with their educated counterparts (Kattan, 2021). It is worthy of note under-aged mothers are at the highest risk of pregnancy-related complication and death (WHO, 2012; Stepp, 2016; World Bank, 2018). All of these can increase the rates of maternal and child mortality and morbidity.

Furthermore, education seems to have connection with economic empowerment. Education is essential in the enhancement of skills and aspirations necessary for acquisition and management of incomes, and makes for higher chances of access to credit. According to Education gives women a disposition for a lifelong acquisition of knowledge, values, attitudes, competence and skills (Aliu, 2016). Therefore, without education, a girl has a higher chances of living on the fringes of poverty and poor women and less likely to quit abusive and violent domestic relationships (World Bank, 2018).

When a mother is not educated, it affects her family in so many ways. Several studies have shown that uneducated mothers are less likely to: engage in quality connections with their children, understand stages of child development, and provide better supports for their families (Muslim Aid, 2020). Uneducated mothers may not be able to promote the education of their children like the educated ones. For instance, India Today (2020) argues those educated mothers are more likely to have books at home and propel their children to succeed at school. The author further indicated that:

An educated mother, not only ensures sending their children to school, but will also provide a supportive environment at home by reinforcing lessons at home. But mothers who are illiterate or uneducated, are not as keen to provide higher education to her children. The uneducated mother, in general, can only think within her limited knowledge sphere and she cannot have lofty dreams or aspirations for herself or for her children. The educated mother will have high expectations for her children's educational success and will continuously encourage them to develop high expectations of their own (web page).

In addition to child's education, educated mothers are more likely to be informed about health and would ensure that their children receive a balanced diet, get adequate healthcare, and timely immunization (Stepp, 2016; Kattan, 2021). On the contrary, mothers without education are more likely to have children who suffer from malnutrition and illiteracy (World Bank, 2018). Unlike the uneducated mothers, the educated ones are more likely to have better incomes and will likely use their earnings for the welfare of their families (Nussbaum, 2003; Kattan, 2021).

Lack of or poor education of females has great socio-economic and public health consequences for the society where she belongs. In view of this, Agarwal and Reddaiah (2005) has called for the status of women in respect of their education to be raised for the benefits of the society. This, according to Bourne (2014), is because, a female who is educated is more likely to have increased personal income, and the potential to reduce poverty within her community (Bourne, 2014). The author added that educated women have the capacity to play a significant economic role in both their families and in wider society, and they are more likely to reinvest 90 per cent of their earnings to their families. On the contrary, uneducated women often find informal and vulnerable jobs, and they are less likely to access credit facilities making them poor (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2012; International Labour Organization [ILO], 2016). It is worthy of note that females occupy the greater population of most countries, and the lesser their per capita income, the poorer their respective countries (Sundholm, 2011; UNESCAP, 2017; Muslim Aid; 2020). For instance, increasing women's education resulted to a 50 per cent increase in the economy of countries that belong to OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2012).

Female education makes for a healthy nation. Mother's education acts as a proxy variable of a number of background variables representing women's higher socioeconomic status, thus enabling her to seek proper medical care whenever she perceives it necessary (Becker, Peters, Gray, Gultiano, & Blake, 1993). According to Nussbaum (2003), and Offorma (2009), education enhances female autonomy, therefore, women develop greater confidence and capabilities to make decisions regarding their own health, as well as their children's health. Nussbaum (2003) further indicated that the uneducated women are less likely to seek higher quality health services and have lesser ability to use health care inputs to produce better health outcomes unlike the educated ones. This often results to poor health outcomes not only for the uneducated women but also for their families. A nation with unhealthy

families is also unhealthy nation. This is why maternal and child mortality have been very high in all countries where female literacy rates have been low, (WHO, 1996; Bourne, 2014).

In politics and nation building, uneducated women are less likely to get involved in elective positions or be given political appointments, less likely to contribute in bringing solution to issues of national concern, and more likely to be used by terrorists and bandits compared to their educated counterparts (Aherkar & Poojari, 2014; Cram, 2020; Muslim Aid, 2020). According to Bourne (2014), at the wider societal level, female education paves way for an increase in female leaders, and lower levels of population growth. This is because lack of education leads to early/child marriage and many children. Bourne added that if all girls had secondary education in sub-Saharan Africa, and South and West Asia, child marriage would fall by 64 per cent.

Despite the consequences of lack female education, the females still have far lesser access to quality education GSNs compared to the males. This seems to be linked with the established gender role in GSNs which put the females at disadvantage. This is explained in the theoretical framework below.

Theoretical Framework

Theories are constructs and postulations that guide or suggest a way in which individuals perceive phenomena and act or behave which in turn may influence the nature and the level of what they know or practice. The present study is anchored on Role Theory propounded by Merton (1957). Merton emphasized that occupying a position in a society is a role that comes with expectations from those who interact with it. In other words, role theory holds that when one understands one's role expectations from the society, one will make conscious efforts not to fall short of that expectation (Biddle, 1986). In GSNs, the main classifying factor in social roles is one's sex at birth. There are traditional behaviours expected of each gender. The agents of socialization such as family, church, etc lay the foundation for gender role expectations, and these expectations tend to foster dominance for the male child and subservience for the female child right birth. Thus, at the age of three, there are fascinating differences in interactions between boys and girls. Girls, were expected to be obedient, submissive and very proficient with domestic chores. On the contrary, the boys are expected to be strong, brave and hardworking, serve as future providers for their family and to be tolerant and intelligent. Therefore, every attention is given to the boys. The girls are not to complain having understood their own roles. Any attempt to deviate from this role is interpreted as deviant behaviour by the society. Therefore, the females themselves

have come to accept that women subordination and deprivation are normal and justifiable (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2017; Ugwu, 2021). Compliance to traditional role assignment that sustain gender stereotypes is why the inequality persists in GSNs.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the state of female education in GSNs. It was revealed that across the GSNs, there is educational disparity where the females are at the disadvantage and this comes with socioeconomic and health consequences. Role theory was used to explain why males have had more access to quality education compared to their female counterparts. In view of the above, the present researchers recommend that:

1. The government of the GSNs should place priority in investing in education with more emphasis on girl child.
2. The government of the GSNs should end fees and charges that discourage parents from sending children to school.
3. The government of the GSNs should help to promote the interest girls and marginalized groups in virtual learning with special intervention such as provision of free or subsidized internet-enabled devices and free data subscription.
4. The government should provide constant virtual learning training for all students and teachers.
5. Government needs to tackle power poverty including providing a low cost multipurpose mobile solar power box for the all communities.
6. The government should ensure that internet services are extended to unreached areas with adequate legal framework and security for protection of those installations.
7. Government should also embark on awareness creation as a way of tackling harsh cultural practices that undermine school enrolment and apathy to ICT utilization among the girls.
8. Families should pay attention to the education of the girl child.

Finally, the present researchers do not claim that these recommendations are the only answers for levelling these identified educational inequalities, but the researchers are certain that if the leaders of GSNs should apply them and borrow a leaf from Bhutan, these disparities would be naturally diminished.

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