Intersecting Inequalities: Gender, Identity, and Social Norms in Women's Education

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Abstract: This literature review explores the same old inequalities women experience in educational equity, now for gains and wins in their abilities to attend school at a pace equal to men. Although much progress has been made internationally to increase female enrollment, gender norms, socio-economic barriers, and underrepresentation of women in STEM fields impede women's access to education and careers. It synthesizes findings from various contexts, including global reports and case studies, to comprehensively overview these disparities. It complicates further educational inequities from an intersectionality perspective between gender, race, and class. The finding underlines the importance of targeting policies to alleviate these disparities and seeks to reform educational content and systemic approaches to gender equity in academia. This study aims to advance efforts that increase women's educational equity and career prospects by exploring current challenges and potential solutions.

Keywords: Educational Equity, Gender Inequality, Women's Education, STEM Fields, Socio-Economic Barriers

1. Introduction

Gender inequalities still characterize many educational systems worldwide, although education is one of the cornerstones of social equity and economic development. While considerable progress has been made in increasing girls' enrollment rates, women remain severely constrained in their ability to acquire quality education and progress through their careers. Among socio-economic factors, poverty and early marriage constrain girls' education, and gender norms restrict educational opportunities for girls by narrowing options in subject choices and career paths, especially in STEM. Race and class further overlap with gender, notably affecting women from poorer socio-economic origins. This study examines the inequalities in educational equity that women face and the existing challenges and potential for developing solutions for women's academic and career prospects in various contexts to complement strategies that have already emerged inclusive of gender equity.

2. Literature review

The literature review focuses on these key themes in women's education — access to education, socio-economic barriers, gender norms, and representation in STEM fields. Regarding

intersectionality, each theme is examined since women's experiences are influenced by many factors, such as race, class, and ethnicity [1]. Through this framework, the intersection of these identities can be examined in detail to determine how these exacerbate educational inequities. The review synthesizes insights from several different contexts to provide an integrated set of understandings of how the current state of women's education stacks up and describes how to deal with disparities of this nature.

2.1. Educational inequities faced by girls

2.1.1. Difficulties in accessing school for girls

In developing countries, women are facing the challenge of accessing education. The reasons for girls not attending school are poverty, cultural norms, and lack of resources. According to Ali et al [2]., families usually prefer to educate their sons over their daughters due to cultural and economic constraints in many societies. Societal values and economic necessity are so ingrained in this preference that it further limits girls' opportunities for education. To give the opportunity of education to everyone is necessary to overcome such cultural and economic barriers [3]. Knowing these challenges, policymakers understand how to develop targeted interventions supporting girls' education. In addition, acknowledging the value of education for promoting women's empowerment will aid in fomenting change in cultural norms and enhancing a focus on girls' educational prospects.

Girl enrollment rates have increased over the last few decades, but disparities remain. Early marriage, household responsibilities, and gender-based violence make girls more prone to drop out of school than boys in some regions [4]. For example, these disparities are also influenced by the lack of infrastructure and resources like insufficient school facilities and lack of educational materials [5]. Such systematic issues need solutions covering obstacles, barriers, and social norms. Societies can strive for gender parity in education by improving citizen education and supporting girls under societal pressure. Additionally, engaging with communities in these efforts can contribute to developing an environment that supports girls' education.

2.1.2. Socio-economic barriers

Education for women is a cross-international issue of great importance, faced with big barriers to attending school. No significant obstacles were found other than poverty and child labor; girls from poor households are compelled to work and, consequently, are prevented from studying [2]. However, cultural norms and gender bias also largely curtailed the educational opportunities available to girls. Many societies expect them to manage household responsibilities and care of family members such that they have limited capacity to attend school [4]. However, in rural areas where educational facilities are scarce and of low quality, girls have even less access to quality education.

While girls' enrollment rates have improved worldwide, there remains a significant gap in low-income countries where enrollment rates for girls are lower than for boys. Girls in low-income countries are less likely to complete secondary school than boys, with only 38 percent finishing lower secondary school [6]. In addition, conflicts and emergencies lead to poor education among girls as schools are demolished or assaulted by shelling, and parents are not ready to send their daughters to school [2]. Furthermore, early marriage results in millions of girls being wed prior to the age of 18, contributing to the prevalent issue of early school dropout [4]. Policies addressing

immediate barriers and implementing underlying social norms are necessary to address these systemic issues.

2.1.3. Gender norms and STEM fields

The impact of gender norms on women's participation in STEM fields strongly influences stereotypes that equate STEM fields with masculine traits. Early exposure to gendered stereotypes discourages girls from pursuing and accepting careers in STEM fields. This problem is compounded by the lack of female role models in STEM leadership roles, as girls look around at her and wonder if they could be in charge of STEM given the roles she so dominates [7]. Other systemic barriers, such as unconscious biases in hiring and promotion processes, also contribute to the underrepresentation of women in STEM. This initiative challenges traditional stereotypes and needs to call for inclusiveness to address these barriers.

Such effects on women's participation in STEM are a multiplicity of factors. The gender-science stereotyping restricts the self-identification of young women with STEM subjects, which impacts their career aspirations and choice. As Allen et al [7]. state, girls are often directed toward traditionally female career options, with very limited selections and little chance of innovation due to the small diversity within the STEM fields. Furthermore, the media and educational settings frequently reinforce these stereotypes, defining STEM as something unsuitable for women. Not only does this shape women's prospects in their careers, but it also influences how the rest of society sees women's contributions in STEM.

To address those gender norms, there is a need for a strategic one. Inclusivity and challenging traditional stereotypes are important steps. Such barriers can be dismantled by giving girls diverse role models and encouraging them to take STEM subjects. Moreover, therefore, institutions need to adopt policies to stop unconscious biases and provide equal opportunities to women in STEM careers [8].

2.2. Promoting gender equality in education through educational content and policy

The role of educational content in shaping students' perceptions and understanding of gender roles is very important. Textbooks and curricula can, however, as well promote stereotypes with men front and center and women in domestic roles, as Bird & Rhoton [8] state. This will shape how students see their career opportunities and feed into societal norms that lower women's participation in several fields. To combat this, educational policy must contemplate including inclusive content representing a broad spectrum of areas and experiences [9]. Educational materials can play a role in supporting the challenge of stereotypical gender language and imagery, empowering girls to move beyond traditional stereotypes and pursue more types of careers. Besides benefiting girls, this approach also helps create a more equitable society by creating opportunities for diversity and diversity of talents.

For gender equity, it is indispensable to promote educational content using policies to improve it. Campbell [10] states that the curricula in schools should be unbiased and eliminate stereotyping since it will be balanced with the gender roles of the pupils. Additionally, educational materials ought to demonstrate the accomplishments of women in various fields and engage girls to work in those fields that are absent [3]. Schools can address some barriers limiting girls' educational and career opportunities by integrating gender-sensitive content into the curricula. How this will be approached calls for efficiency between educators, policymakers, and community leaders to ensure that educational materials meet the overarching societal goals of gender equality.

To address women's participation in education, it is essential to evaluate not only the administrative elements such as structures, personnel, borders, procedures, and legal frameworks but also the systemic factors influencing women's involvement in education. Some of these are dropping out early, which is influenced by society, and ensuring access to educational resources and facilities. It should be able to create a safe and inclusive learning environment for learning for girls without discrimination or bias, which is already done [11]. Alleviating these systemic barriers will enable educational systems to be more supportive of getting girls to achieve their full potential and to participate in more equitable societies. It is a continuous assessment and policy change to meet different student populations' needs.

The approaches and needed policies are multidimensional for reforming educational content and gender equity. Curricula must be rewritten, and educators must be educated on how to identify and overturn gender biases in teaching [12]. In addition, parents and communities should also be involved in these efforts to recruit a wider network of support for girls's education [7]. Educational systems can help realize the potential of policies to be implemented and sustained by partnering schools, policymakers, and community organizations. This collaborative approach is essential for creating and sustainably changing gender equity in education and ensuring more equitable and inclusive societies.

2.3. Intersectionality: gender, identity and norms

Women's identity barriers are to be understood within their intersectionality. There are vast barriers to women's access to good education, especially in poor countries. High dropout rates among girls, mainly due to socio-economic factors, including poverty and early marriage, are major obstacles [13]. In addition, Ishimaru and Galloway [14] assert that gender norms and stereotypes constrain girls' choices about subjects and career paths, which enhances the barriers they face in entering STEM fields. Further systems issues are ignited by insufficient educational infrastructure and resources and preclude girls from choosing to pursue their educational ambitions [5]. In order to address these challenges, comprehensive policies that meet both immediate barriers and underlying societal norms are needed.

Since gender overlaps with race and class, the findings emphasize the importance of countering the intersectionality of gender with race and class as a key dimension of educational inequities. Kawuryan et al [6]. state that women from marginalized groups struggle with the extraordinary, compounded challenges of racism and economic restraints, and all of these factors make them less likely to access quality education. The races and classes that intersect with one of these characteristics also impact their educational opportunities, career, career advancement, and social mobility [14]. This intersectionality in recognizing these identities allows policymakers to target the appropriate interventions for women of multiple backgrounds. Achieving true equity in school requires this approach to ensuring that all women are given equal opportunities to grow to their full potential.

Women's career choices and chances are intersected not only by their taking on any of the above identities but also by those responding to the fact that they are women. Votes from women of disadvantaged groups can be biased in hiring and promotion processes, restricting their progress in all fields [1]. Furthermore, Clavero and Galligan [15] state that societal expectations based on race, gender, and class can dictate what kinds of careers they are 'allowed' to pursue. For instance, however, women of certain racial backgrounds may be pointed in the direction of more traditional roles instead of in STEM fields. This is why addressing these biases means taking a comprehensive approach – training individuals at the employer and educator levels to recognize and resist these

stereotypes. Societies can create inclusive environments for women from different backgrounds to aspire to make their career decisions and be fulfilled.

To address women's intersectional challenges in education requires a specifically nuanced and complicated approach. Policies have to be designed keeping in mind the particular conditions of women from diverse backgrounds, such as race, income class, and disability. It means creating an inclusive education space where women feel supported and recognized. Secondly, other means of financial assistance and mentorship programs specially targeted toward marginalized groups can help fill the gap in educational opportunities. This helps societies address intersectional challenges and reach true equity in education, where all women reach their full potential. In addition to benefiting people, this approach is helping lead to more diverse and, therefore, more equitable societies.

3. Discussion

The main finding of this literature review is that women continue to suffer from inequalities regarding educational equity, which calls for comprehensive strategies in order to reverse these inequalities. Important barriers are socio-economic, gender norms, and underrepresentation in STEM fields, with targeted interventions needed. Thus, policymakers can develop policies that recognize the intersectionality of gender with race and class to address the different experiences of women from different backgrounds [1]. Such an approach is necessary if equity in education is to be achieved and all women have equal opportunities to pursue their educational and career aspirations.

The importance of educational content and policy reforms for a gender-equitable society is also reflected in the discussion. Stereotypes are perpetuated in educational materials that contain discriminatory patterns that influence how students perceive roles that they should be playing and the type of careers they should pursue. It is imperative that educational content is challenged and that inclusive learning environments are fostered by policies that will reform how it is taught [1]. At the same time, systemic solutions are required to correct women's underrepresentation in STEM fields, including education and training for educators and employers who can eliminate and challenge bias. Societies can increase diversity and equity in STEM by creating spaces for women and supporting them in STEM.

These findings have implications for addressing the issue of education and gender inequalities. One such example is a series of policy changes, community mobilization, and public awareness efforts aimed at overturning established gender standards. Rosa & Clavero [1] argue that societies can aid in achieving gender equity in education by the promotion of girls and women at the educational context and helping girls and women under pressure in society. Second, if women's education is economically and socially beneficial, then social priorities can be shifted, promoting the development towards a more equal, if not sustainable, development. It can potentially raise the innovation, health outcomes, and participation of women in politics and across society more broadly and enhance the diversity of ideas that make up society into a more equitable and inclusive, diverse ideas society.

4. Conclusions

This literature review concludes that these inequalities in educational equity persist on behalf of women and that multiple approaches are necessary to end these inequities. Furthermore, overcoming socioeconomic barriers, gender norms, and underrepresentation in STEM fields are the major challenges to overcome. Gender compounding with race and class worsens the difficulties, as well

as requiring the development of separate policies for each woman's individual story. To promote gender equity, it is necessary to have good educational content and policy reform. A multi-faceted approach, policy, community agenda, and societal awareness campaign are necessary to realize gender equity in education. Societies need to invest in women's education to allow more equitable sustainable development and thereby promote enhancement in the innovation capacity, improve health outcomes, and promote women's political participation. This means more variety and better outcomes for women and industries.

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