



Intersectional Education

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Executive Summary

Education leads to higher future success, freedom, autonomy over one's lifestyle, and an overall better quality of life. Unfortunately, women make up seventy percent of the world's out-of-school youth. Additionally, minority groups are suffering from lack of access to educational resources, including native tongue instruction (Intel 2012). Not only are both groups suffering separately, but the intersection of female and minority groups are not achieving the same educational outcomes as majority or male groups. This brief explores this problem and examines how some governments are trying—or not trying—to address it.

Introduction

In the book *Politics, Gender, and Concepts*, S. Laurel Weldon defines intersectionality as, “a concept that describes the interaction between systems of oppression. The concept grew out of efforts to specify how race and gender relations shaped social and political life” (Weldon, 2008). The focus of this research was based on whether women in minority groups are getting the same quality of education and continuing their education at the same rate as the male minority and majority groups. Intersectionality is important to understand that one person's marginalization is not just the effect of belonging to one group but can happen from multiple groups into which they fall.

As a group, we were interested in pursuing the broad topic of education and whether or not everyone around the globe was easily obtaining access to quality education. When diving into this topic, the two marginalized groups that stood out were women and minorities. We decided then to look at the intersection of the two groups to determine why minority girls and women were not receiving the same quality or amount of education as others. Ultimately, we found that even the countries with top education systems for their overall population have room for growth when it comes to educating females in at-risk minority racial and ethnic groups.

Approaches and Results

The data collected for this study is both qualitative and quantitative. As a sampling rule, we chose a “leader” and “lagger” from each continent based on whether or not countries achieved gender parity, or gender equality, in primary and secondary education. Because South Africa turned out to be a poor representative of a “lagger” in Africa,

Ethiopia was also included. The goal was to obtain a representative global sample, and the chosen countries can be seen in Attachment 1. A divide and conquer approach was used to collect the data; each of us researched three countries to find the primary-to-secondary transition rates, the percentage of students out of school, government education expenditures, global education competitiveness scores, and relevant policy and United Nations Millennium Development Goals data. When possible, data was collected for these variables for each gender, at-risk minority groups, and the intersection of the two. Most of the data was accessible through United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) databases, notably the Global Education Monitoring Report.

Finding individual country's policies proved to be more difficult because not all government sites are created equally. Some provided more easily accessible information than others, while others did not collect the data at all. For example, many more industrialized nations do not report transition data across all minorities and genders; these countries are not concerned about this particular transition because so many of their students make this change already. The primary focus of this project was collecting intersectional data since intersectional education indicators have not been previously constructed. To make this data useful, we compiled country fact sheets for each country sampled (Attachment 5), in addition to regional and income comparisons for the sample (Attachment 4).

Overall, most countries had similar or equal transition rates for each gender (Attachment 2). In particular, most countries had nearly equal transition rates for female minorities and the average population, which means female minorities do not seem to be left behind. Yet, examining the specific policies within each country and the out-of-school rates for each gender may suggest different findings. While many countries have worked to address educational gaps between both gender and majority and minority populations, few policies address the problems that exist for female minority students.

Many countries are making moderate progress in their attempts to achieve Millennium Development Goal 2, Universal Primary Education and Development Goal 3, Gender Equality and

Empowering Women (Attachment 3). Furthermore, countries, including Kenya, might have higher transition rates and relatively high out-of-school rates, meaning that some girls are not given a chance to begin their educations. The findings for each country and how they compare regionally can be seen in the profile sheets, which are the contents of Attachment 5.

Conclusion

Globally, it may seem a country is doing well in creating and sustaining educational opportunities for the entirety of the population if they are meeting or on-track to meet the Millennium Development Goals for universal primary education and female empowerment, have average or above average transition rates, and have a high global education competitiveness score. However, meeting these metrics may not tell the entire story, especially when looking at an intersectional group such as minority females.

Ethiopia, for example, experiences similar transition rates to the Sub-Saharan Africa region as a whole, in addition to similar out of school children. This means that on average Ethiopia resembles Sub-Saharan Africa in their ability to get children into primary schooling and sustain their time in school. Yet, in looking at some of Ethiopia's minority populations such as the Sadama, Silte, and Hadiya, the average transition rates are nearly 20 percent lower than Ethiopia as a whole. This indicates that education in Ethiopia, on average, is not the same educational situation for some minority groups. Furthermore, while Ethiopia has put educational policies in place aimed at promoting female education and minority educational instruction, the intersection of these two groups has not been necessarily promoted.

Even developed western countries are facing the same educational situation where intersectional groups, such as minority women, are not achieving the same transition rates as the average population. Germany experiences extremely high transition rates for the population as a whole, and even for women. However, minority transition rates drop over ten percent in comparison to the population as a whole, indicating the ability to keep minorities and minority females in the German education system is not as successful as for the population in general. Furthermore, in Germany many minorities are put

into educational tracks leading to vocational school that may limit their career opportunities because of their different educational needs. While Germany and Ethiopia differ in their global education competitiveness, with Germany ranking near the top of education quality and competitiveness at number eight, and Ethiopia ranking number 130, educational attainment can still be an issue regardless for intersectional groups.

Intersectional groups, such as minority females, are not to be overlooked. To truly achieve universal primary education, as stated in the Millennium Development Goals, all populations must be reached, including those with multiple hurdles to overcome. Further access to education, particularly sustained quality education, provide additional economic opportunities for female minorities. Observing aggregate data may paint a picture that a particular country is achieving quality education and thus further economic opportunities for their population, but by disaggregating the data and observing that those female minorities are not necessarily experiencing the same educational quality and quantity, a more clearly developed understanding of the situation is possible.

Implications

Many of the countries we studied have policies to help facilitate the education of both females and minorities. However, these policies are not designed to meet the unique needs of female minorities, and specific policies for these groups are rare. In fact, some countries do not even collect data on female minorities as a group. A government's failure to collect such data highlights a problematic mentality where the people creating policy do not consider the fact that female minorities may face unique barriers to quality education not just for being female or for being an at-risk minority, but for being simultaneously a member of both disadvantaged groups. Governments need to create policies that address the specific needs of female minorities. However, those requirements will inevitably vary by country and by minority group. There is no one size fits all policy. Each country comes to the table with its own unique historical and political context and its system of education. Therefore, each government must decide for itself how best to address the needs of their female at-risk minorities. For some countries, that may mean improving transition rates by finding ways to retain

female minorities through secondary school. Other countries that have different tracks for secondary school may want to ensure that they are not systematically pushing female minorities into the least prestigious path. Other countries may find that their resources should be spent developing programs that encourage female minorities to explore Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. Ultimately, each country must assess its weaknesses and act accordingly.

References

1. Weldon, S. Laurel. *Politics, Gender, and Concepts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
2. "Girls Education: Why It Matters." *Intel Girls and Women*. Intel: 2012.
3. Appendices:
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