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Abstract

The article draws on qualitative educational research across a diversity of low-income countries to examine the gendered inequalities in education as complex, multi-faceted and situated rather than a series of barriers to be overcome through linear input–output processes focused on isolated dimensions of quality. It argues that frameworks for thinking about educational quality often result in analyses of gender inequalities that are fragmented and incomplete. However, by considering education quality more broadly as a terrain of quality it investigates questions of educational transitions, teacher supply and community participation, and develops understandings of how education is experienced by learners and teachers in their gendered lives and their teaching practices. By taking an approach based on theories of human development the article identifies dynamics of power underpinning gender inequalities in the literature and played out in diverse contexts and influenced by social, cultural and historical contexts. The review and discussion indicate that attaining gender equitable quality education requires recognition and understanding of the ways in which inequalities intersect and interrelate in order to seek out multi-faceted strategies that address not only different dimensions of girls' and women's lives, but understand gendered relationships and structurally entrenched inequalities between women and men, girls and boys.

Keywords

gender equality, human development, low- and middle-income countries, quality education

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Introduction

Global policies and education interventions aimed at meeting the Education For All (EFA) goals and the targets for Millennium Development Goals (MDG) 2 (achieving universal primary education) and 3 (eliminating gender disparities in all levels of education) by 2015¹ have been concerned to improve girls' enrolment in school so that they can achieve parity with boys. In recent years more attention has been placed on improving not only gender parity of access but gender parity of educational attainment, measured primarily through exam scores and years of schooling completed. Recent critiques of this educational focus with its strong emphasis on measurement in terms of exam results highlight how it fails to take into account the diversity of contexts in which schools function and girls and boys live. It neglects the nature of their educational experiences and of the multiple influences on their aspirations and ability to achieve an education they value (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2007; Rao, 2010) In this article, rather than trying to establish linear relationships between gender gaps, how barriers or obstacles cause these gaps and how they can be overcome to eradicate disparities, our emphasis is on understanding how gender inequalities in education are enmeshed in issues of power and identity and how educational processes are influenced by social, cultural and historical contexts. We are concerned, then, with how forms of educational discrimination for girls are enacted, perpetuated and experienced and with investigating the research evidence for understandings of how to move towards greater quality and equality and to ensure that all learners experience an education they value.

To do this the first section investigates frameworks for thinking about gender equality in relation to quality education and critiques what we believe are limited and only partial explanatory frameworks. We argue that the way in which frameworks for thinking about educational quality divide the concept of quality into different areas or dimensions often results in an analysis of gender inequalities that is not just divided but fragmented and incomplete. Our analysis of educational quality begins with asking how girls experience education, what is the nature of the discrimination they encounter and how is it informed by beliefs and attitudes prevailing within schools and in wider social contexts about their abilities, their identities as girls and women and their agency. Such an approach involves addressing not just one or two dimensions of quality but looking across all dimensions in a broad sweep that takes in questions of context and educational environment as well as the situated educational experiences of girls and women in diverse contexts. These we embrace within the notion of the 'terrain of quality' (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2012). The second section outlines the approach we take to gender equality, distinguishing it from a technical and instrumental approach embedded in discourses of parity by insisting on the need to uncover the workings of power and structured social divisions and institutional practices. The third section draws on a review of qualitative research to demonstrate the contextual and socially embedded nature of gender inequalities and educational quality across diverse geographical, socio-cultural and political contexts. Looking at the broad terrain of quality, in this section we consider the educational environment and problematize instrumental approaches to questions of educational transitions, teacher supply and community participation. The fourth

section examines the qualitative research evidence in terms of educational processes and how these are experienced. It examines the gendered nature of curriculum processes and of teachers' lives and their teaching practices. The article draws on current research to indicate ways in which gender identities are mutable, how they intersect with other identities and dynamics of inequality. It concludes by highlighting how the evidence illustrates that gendered inequalities in education are complex, multi-faceted and situated rather than a series of barriers to be overcome through linear input–output processes focused on isolated dimensions of quality. Addressing educational quality in ways that also address gendered inequalities demands attention to much more than gender parity of enrolment or exam results and calls for recognition of different workings of power and diverse shaping of identities by multiple actors in multiple contexts.

This article is an expanded version of a review of published qualitative research literature from Pakistan, Malawi, Cambodia and Peru prepared for the UNGEI conference held in Dakar in 2010 entitled 'Engendering Empowerment: Education and Equality' (Aikman and Rao, 2010). While we have expanded and complemented the original review, we have inevitably missed some rich and important research.

Gender equality through lenses of quality education

This section looks at ways in which gender equality has been considered within the expansive field of quality education research. We note that the definitions of quality education have been subject to extensive critique. Different definitions of quality are informed by wider theoretical approaches and development paradigms, within which gender is (or is not) approached in theoretically consistent ways. Recent critiques by Bivens et al. (2009) and Tikly and Barrett (2011) of a human capital informed approach outline the limitations of a human capital analysis which assumes that quality can be measured in terms of standardized testing with the quality of learning addressed in terms of linear relationships between inputs, processes and outputs. Drawing on an input–process–output approach and a concern with learning outcomes and how these are mediated by quality inputs and processes, the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) developed 22 case studies examining different quality 'factors' – classroom, school, system, community – and considered the need to achieve seven pillars of sustainable quality improvement, one of which was to 'manage the challenge of equity', which included the 'gender challenge' (Verspoor, 2008: 40). Gender equality in education in such an approach is one of many considerations in relation to factors, dimensions and, areas of quality. Where there is more discussion of the nature of the 'gender challenge' this is often viewed as a problem for girls and their underachievement in relation to boys. Meeting the challenge of equity becomes centred on achieving gender parity, meaning that boys and girls achieve the same learning outcomes as defined in national education programmes, through processes which promote fairness of treatment and equal opportunities.

However, gender parity is found to be a narrow aspiration which does not engage with more challenging notions of gender equality, which raise issues of, for example, girls' and boys' labour and how this is differently valued, carried out and with different impact

on learning for girls and boys, or with multiple considerations that impact on girls' and boys' different abilities to transition through the formal education system. Input–process–output approaches treat gender inequalities as deficits or barriers for girls, which need to be overcome. They underplay or avoid an analysis of the ways in which power operates within institutions such as the school, and within society more widely. For instance, when quality is defined as an abstracted list of characteristics, and girls as bearers of particular deficits, they are seen to require additional inputs from teachers because they are, for example, less forthcoming in class, more subject to control by parents and demands on their time for childcare and housework, more at risk of gender-based violence, and have less natural aptitude for mathematics and science.

A strong critique of this approach comes from human rights analyses which outline dimensions of quality from a learner-centred perspective (UNICEF, 2007), not a systems or institutional perspective, and are concerned with rights in, to and through education (Tomasevski, 2003). Girls are identified as being particularly vulnerable to an abuse of their right to an education through deficits in the quality of education, and attention is laid on assessing and improving the capacity of girls to claim their rights. A rights approach considers obstacles which prevent girls realizing their right to education and is concerned with engaging duty holders, in particular governments, to make changes that will improve the opportunities and experience of education for girls and boys. However, a rights approach can be limited and focus overly on the individual and the schooling process, neglecting wider economic and social contexts and processes which hinder and impede girls' ability to realize their rights. Greany (2008) indicates areas where a rights approach is being challenged to engage with issues of collective rights, of intersecting and overlapping rights and with a questioning of the linear progress model of western value systems. Fox (2003) offers an example of how there may be conflict between the rights and roles promoted in the school by international NGOs and family and community expectations for girls.

Tikly (2011) and Tikly and Barrett (2011) use the concept of 'good quality education' to extend insights from human capital and rights-based approaches to questions of social justice and capabilities. They also embrace a post-colonial critique, based on work in four Sub-Saharan African countries, which emphasizes the importance of context and positioning in understanding meanings of 'good quality education' (Tikly and Barrett, 2011). These critiques and the frameworks they propose highlight ways in which, rather than being 'enabling environments', schools can be places of abuse and violence for girls, and how the school itself is embedded in its wider environment with its own webs of meaning and practices. This allows for a concept of gender equality which is concerned with understanding processes through which educational inequalities between boys and girls are embedded in structural hierarchies and social, cultural and economic power differentials that perpetuate disadvantage and discrimination (Aikman et al., 2011).

Frameworks for analysing quality education, then, often result in a fragmentary analysis of gender, broken down into investigations of single dimensions of quality, such as gender representations in curriculum materials, or limited to institutional school-oriented factors, failing to link these analyses with ways in which roles, identities and relationships are articulated and perpetuated through multiple and interacting processes of

pedagogy, teachers' training, classroom interactions. This, in turn, means that the gender analysis within educational quality work may be disarticulated and superficial. The more complex and political issues of power relationships, linguistic and ethnic identity, the intersection of gender and other inequalities, and the construction, diversity and mutability of gendered relationships across time and space are ignored or investigated in a piecemeal fashion.

Aikman and Unterhalter (2012) have argued for the importance of thinking about quality not from the perspective of inputs and lists of dimensions or characteristics – however defined – but as a terrain encompassing multiple and intersecting 'dimensions' of quality. The home and community environment of the learners, the policy environment at many levels, the school environment and the teaching and learning processes and interactions all comprise the 'terrain' for thinking about what gender equality can mean and how it can be achieved in different contexts. From this perspective, 'gender' or 'girls' are not barriers or obstacles to achieving 'quality education' but, rather, gender inequalities are outcomes of forms of inequality and exclusions arising out of political, social, economic and cultural processes and structures which permeate the terrain of quality education (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2012).

Gender, education and development – locating 'quality'

The gender parity focus of educational human capital-inspired research has drawn its concepts of gender from a women in development (WID) approach which highlights, among other things, an instrumental approach to girls' education. It harks back to its beginnings in the 1970s when there was a concern to bring women into development planning in order to improve the efficiency of projects and programmes. In the educational sphere this translated into a search for overcoming barriers to girls and women's participation in formal education so that, through their raised literacy rates and their learning about health, nutrition and contraception among other things they could contribute to wider societal and economic development (King and Hill, 1993; World Bank, 1995). Together with a call for girls' and women's rights to education, this approach today is concerned with women's educational benefits and societal benefits of women's education and with elucidating general policy prescriptions and directives for multilateral agencies and donors (Herz and Sperling, 2004; Lewis and Lockheed, 2006; UNESCO, 2003). While these have a 'commonsense' feel to them and appear straightforward and uncomplicated, the concerns of individual women in specific contexts are not taken into account and implementational issues are not problematized (see critiques by Arnot and Fennell, 2008; Kabeer, 2003; Unterhalter, 2005, 2007).

A focus on power structures, and how power operates, stems from a different approach to gender inequalities in education in development contexts. A gender and development (GAD) tradition puts its educational focus on institutions and the power relations and sexual division of labour in ministries of education as well as schools and school-community relations and aid modalities (Budlender, 2007; Stromquist, 2001). This approach offers insights into who has power and what kind of power to, for example, make decisions about schooling and school processes such as curriculum aims and pedagogical strategies for teaching and learning, what is appropriate knowledge for girls and

boys to learn, and questions of women's and men's different career paths and employment pay and conditions.

Considerations of gendered identities as both socially constructed and multiple draws on research from post-structural and post-colonial positionings. From these perspectives the values given to gendered identities are explored through questions of how male and female curricular subjects come to be validated as well as contested and challenged. They take us beyond questions of numbers of representations of girls and women in textbooks to questioning the portrayal of gendered roles and how classroom roles and relationships reinforce gender stereotypes, entrench power relationships and reaffirm otherness. There is also a growing body of research critiquing schools and formal education for displacing or marginalizing local or indigenous women's knowledge and for universalization of notions of 'third world woman' and 'girl child' and of 'development' itself (Aikman, 2002; Fennell and Arnot, 2008; Hickling-Hudson et al., 2004; Sieder and Macleod, 2012) and the ways teachers and educational discourses bestow different values on diverse identities or stigmatize certain femininities and masculinities (Chege, 2004; Khandekar et al., 2008; Rao, 2010). While the agenda for the universalization of education and for UPE (universal primary education) focuses on formal schooling, this often excludes poor women or indigenous women, who are constructed as being non-capable of engaging successfully with mainstream systems, leading directly or indirectly to their exclusion from these systems. They then opt for alternative, often less prestigious, forms of learning, where they can construct their identities in positive ways (Rao and Hossain, 2011), but which nevertheless remain unrecognized in policy discourses.

A human development and capabilities analysis of gender and development draws on several of the different approaches above to focus on empowerment through a plural notion of equalities, diverse and shifting forms of agency and freedoms to achieve valuable objectives (Unterhalter, 2005). Gender is viewed as a multi-dimensional concept at the intersection of structured social divisions such as class, race, ethnicity and poverty and is concerned with different and changing forms of agency and valued freedoms. In this article we engage with a notion of gender stemming from a human development approach. We aim to throw light on questions of power and hegemonic discourses and practices, social, cultural, group identities and their intersections with gendered identities in relation to gender equality, working from a standpoint of gender itself as a multi-dimensional concept. We draw on approaches that go beyond the instrumental as these can result in lists of policy prescriptions and strategies for 'ensuring excluded girls receive the support they need to obtain an education' (Lewis and Lockheed, 2006: 113) but which do not engage with the complexity of situated practices. A human development approach – with all its complexities – indicates the importance of considerations of justice for women, for, as Nussbaum (2000:1) says, women have unequal human capabilities because of unequal social and political circumstances.

In the following sections we investigate qualitative research literature primarily from four selected countries (Pakistan, Malawi, Cambodia and Peru), which comprises a diversity of understandings of gender and addresses different aspects of quality education. This literature takes us across the wide terrain of quality, first touching on the notion of the educational environment and on the nature of the educational experience and

relationships in order to identify the nature of the social and political circumstances which contribute to the unequal development of girls' and women's capabilities.

The educational environment in context

Several recent attempts to assess global progress towards gender equality within educational systems have underlined the importance of context (ASPBAE and UNGEI, 2010; Unterhalter, 2006), and have hence sought to capture the overall environment in a country that can enable or hinder girls' and women's participation, both within and outside schools. An 'enabling environment' is influenced by the resources available, but also the structures and processes that shape the educational experience, including the nature of both social expectations and opportunities in the broader environment. In this section we identify three areas of the environment. The first is to do with educational possibilities through the life course and educational transitions, explored in relation to the literature on stipends. The second is concerned with understanding the nature and supply of teachers, beyond an instrumental focus on numbers and parity, to consider conditions for gender-equitable teaching and learning. The third section touches on questions of participation, gendered dynamics and structural conditions for women's participation in school management and other decision-making fora.²

Policy attention globally has largely focused on financial resources, on how educational budgets are prepared and what they prioritize. Driven by an analysis of school enrolment and completion rates, characteristics of children who are out of school are identified, pointing to girls from rural, poor backgrounds, subjected to cultural norms around early marriage and female seclusion (Lewin, 2007) as being a major target group. This has led to a spate of incentive and stipend programmes to attract girls and keep them in school, for educational reasons, but equally to contribute to a longer-term transformation of social and cultural norms.

The much discussed Bangladesh Female Secondary School Stipend Project, receipt of which, for a young woman, is conditional on remaining unmarried, is seen to have increased the age at marriage of girls, with consequent delays in first births. While the programme has indeed led to a rise in enrolment of girls in secondary schools, exceeding in fact that of boys in both rural and urban areas (Shafiq, 2009), its impact on delayed marriage, enhancing employment opportunities or indeed voice in marriage is hard to establish (Rao, 2012). Further, the school system has not kept pace with the rising enrolment of female students; teachers are poorly qualified, materials are scarce and infrastructure strained. Dropout and repetition rates are high, with a much smaller number of girls actually able to pass their secondary school examinations. The curriculum has no technical or life-skills, nor any transformatory significance, hence while it may indeed marginally delay the age at marriage, it is not designed to empower girls. If the programme had focused instead on the experience and the content of learning, and the broader economic and social context, with an emphasis on capabilities rather than enrolments, more opportunities for girls' and women's participation could perhaps have been created (Schurmann, 2009).

A school stipend programme in varied forms, such as the free primary education projects in Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania and several other countries across the world,

cash-transfer interventions in Mexico, Brazil and Chile, the female school stipend projects in sub-Saharan Africa (Rwanda, Congo and Ghana) and the Punjab region of Pakistan, have helped enhance girls' enrolments in both primary and secondary schools (Chaudhury and Parajuli, 2008; Filmer and Schady, 2008). Al-Samarrai and Zaman (2007) demonstrate, in the case of Malawi, how the abolition of fees for primary schooling in 1994 led to a massive expansion in enrolments, yet despite donor provision of classrooms, other infrastructural support and instructional material, less than a fifth completed primary school. A similar situation can be seen in India (Bandyopadhyay and Subrahmanian, 2008), Cambodia (Tan, 2007) and virtually all major countries struggling to meet the MDG and EFA goals.

What these various stipend programmes reveal is that, while they are crucial for improving access, especially for poor households, they are not sufficient for achieving gender equality in terms of challenging social, economic inequalities and power structures. In Malawi, the secondary stipends supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) mainly go to girls from wealthy households, who have access to resources to meet the additional costs of schooling (such as investments in uniforms and stationery apart from contributions to the school for possibly longer periods of time), leading to tensions between recipient and non-recipient girls and their families (Chapman and Mushlin, 2008). In Bangladesh, while poor girls do access stipends, a large number of them study in *madrasas* (Islamic religious schools), which train them to be good wives and mothers rather than enabling them to gain critical perspectives (Rao and Hossain, 2011). Additionally, children's labour is valuable for survival and meeting livelihood needs, while the perceived returns from schooling are not clear (Rao, 2012).

There are also concerns around the transition from school to a work environment where women's skills and knowledge are not necessarily recognized and valued. The intuitive linkage between education and better labour market outcomes explored in human capital approaches that seek to calculate rates of return to educational investments do not always play out in reality. This is due to multiple cultural and social factors that valorize particular professions (such as teaching) as well as roles (such as home-making) for women, or where, alongside globalization processes, women are channelled into low-paid, insecure work. With Segregation across sectors further disadvantages women (Munshi and Rosenzweig, 2006; Rao et al., 2008; UNICEF and UNGEI, 2008).

At an institutional level, in response to government commitments to universal primary education (UPE), and the growing demands for education, states have responded by rapidly expanding formal schooling provision. The pressure on schools has led to an increase in classroom size, lack of adequate numbers of trained teachers available, as well as lack of attention to child-centred pedagogies and a more relevant curriculum addressing the needs of the rural poor, and ethnic and other minority groups. Establishing a linear relationship between inputs and outputs has led to short-sighted responses, overlooking the complex interrelationships between different structures, processes and practices across the notion of a terrain of quality.

For instance, one way of meeting the teacher shortage has been through the recruitment of low-paid and untrained local teachers, often called para-teachers or contract teachers.

Cambodia is an interesting case, which saw a rapid expansion in the teaching force and teacher training institutes in the 1980s, yet by the 1990s there was a severe shortage, leading to the appointment of contract teachers, usually local, with low formal qualifications. The appointment of contract teachers was abandoned in 2001, even though, in some areas, for instance those inhabited by ethnic minorities, they played an important role, being bilingual and hence able to communicate with the children. The government instead chose to use double shifts for certified teachers, but with low salaries and delayed payments, this was not an adequate incentive for teachers to perform their duties. In fact, most of them either cultivated land or engaged in another income-generating activity, including charging students informal fees in order to survive (Geeves and Bredenburg, 2005). Hence, despite rapid increases in enrolment, dropouts and repetition remained high; opportunity costs for students from poor families were great. Scholarships were not sufficient to cover school costs including the supplementary fees charged informally by teachers, especially given that their incomes were essential for family survival (Tan, 2007).

In India too, reviews of para-teachers have shown that, while often better qualified than the public school teachers, they are paid less. This reduces their incentive to teach and makes them look for alternative work, through moonlighting in other professions or providing private tuition to the students (Rao, 2010). This is not just a question of the 'quality of teaching' suffering, but teaching itself is devalued as a low-paid, increasingly 'feminized' profession, with poor working conditions. In the absence of alternative jobs, both local men and women are employed as teachers; however, with wages insufficient for survival, teaching is increasingly constructed as a secondary occupation rather than a profession.

High teacher absenteeism in state schools has contributed to the mushrooming of low-fee-paying private schools. When they pay fees, parents feel entitled to monitor teacher behaviour and hold such schools accountable for their child's performance. Hence those parents with limited resources would rather send only one child to a private school – in South Asia this is likely to be a son – and keep others either at home or in employment, rather than wasting resources at the state school, where learning is seen to be negligible (Aslam and Kingdon, 2008; Lloyd et al., 2005). A new segregation is visible in India, with boys increasingly enrolled in private schools and girls deprived of the only opportunity for formal learning available to them (Ramachandran, 2004), entrenching in the process not just inequalities in educational quality, but also gender stereotypes and inequalities.

Decentralization and participatory decision-making can potentially enhance accountability, transparency and the flexibility of the educational system, making it more responsive to the diverse and changing needs of learners, yet in reality, rather than genuine empowerment and control, especially over the teaching and learning process, it is only managerial and administrative autonomy that is granted to schools or parents (UNESCO, 2003), often with a focus on cost-effectiveness, including raising resources at the local level. Villagers in Bangladesh therefore tend to select better-off men in the community to represent them in the School Management Committees (SMCs), as the poorest and women have neither the time nor the resources, whether financial or in terms of social networks, to contribute to the school's functioning (Bray, 2003; Wood et al., 2004).

Further, with mothers not officially recognized as 'guardians', women have been excluded from these SMCs, thus reproducing traditional, male-centred social organization, though informal Mothers' Committees have been set up to assist with the functioning of the school. In Cambodia too, while communities did provide material contributions, their participation in internal decision-making was limited, due to local socio-cultural norms which upheld social hierarchies including teacher dominance in educational issues (Pellini, 2005). Cornwall (2002) distinguishes these as transient spaces, which lack official recognition, versus institutional spaces, which aim to link citizens with the local government. In this instance, women lack access to institutional spaces which can provide them with a legitimate voice, and are restricted to informal support roles, which don't necessarily create equal opportunities or shift existing power relations and authority structures.

In Balochistan province of Pakistan, the community was involved in selecting the teachers locally, ensuring their safety and regular attendance in the schools. But as male village leaders could not freely interact with the female teachers or enter the classrooms, women's village education committees were set up, and their involvement in the school has been crucial for increasing girls' enrolment and providing support to the teachers (Anzar et al., 2004). Barrs (2005) found that in rural Punjab community governance and participation in terms of appreciation of teachers, cooperation to solve problems and bring children, especially girls, to school, ensure that their salaries were paid on time, and other school needs such as equipment and water were provided, led to enhanced teacher motivation. Khan (2007) also notes for Punjab that change is gradually visible in school councils, in terms of inclusiveness and issues of pedagogy and curriculum, formerly the domain of the professional educators. It becomes important therefore to ensure that women are supported in their leadership roles at all levels, so that their participation is both effective and meaningful.

Community-school engagement in issues across the quality terrain, be it through monitoring teacher attendance, ensuring girls go to school and are safe in school, or even just their moral support and recognition of the value of schooling, need to be premised on mutual respect and worth rather than unequal hierarchies, if gender equality is to become real. For communities to participate effectively in schooling, they need to both have accessible spaces for participation and be convinced of its relevance and responsiveness to their lives.

In the case of India, Jain (2003) points out that, while women can potentially be change agents as demonstrated by the experience of Mahila Samakhyas, a project focusing on education for women's empowerment, despite the rhetoric of decentralization, basic education is often governed by the local bureaucracy on the basis of standardized guidelines, with little scope for context-specific responses. Sayed further points to the difficulties of changing 'the pathologies of the current system of supervision . . . which focus on the formal over the pedagogic, the procedural over the professional, and the evaluative over the developmental' (2010: 61). This tension has wider relevance and remains an outstanding issue in terms of shifting the cultures of decision-making and the power and accountability structures embedded in processes of control that could contribute to a more gender-equitable education.

What these examples highlight is the need for a broader vision of gender equality in education as linked to all aspects of political, economic and social life, rather than an instrumental view that focuses only on the material inputs and outputs in relation to girls' education. Issues of power and empowerment, teachers' multiple contexts and motivations, educational transitions as part of wider life trajectories are key to understanding the constituents of an enabling educational environment for gender equality. What the examples presented also reveal is the importance of women's and men's genuine community participation and control in school management and the classroom for these interventions to succeed.

Experiences of education

There is today a growing base of qualitative research offering insights and understandings of what happens within the 'black box' of teaching and learning, of classroom interactions and pedagogical approaches. This section examines some of the literature which engages with questions of gendered processes of teaching and learning, of gendered hierarchies of knowledge and intersections of language, culture, ethnicity and wealth-based inequalities.

Gender differences can be found in the gendered identities that girls and boys, teachers and parents reproduce. Negative self-images and beliefs about girls as failing, unconfident students reinforce socially prescribed and gendered identities. Such identities lead girls to believe that they cannot do as well as boys, and that their future is mapped out in terms of marriage rather than academic excellence. Girls and boys encounter multiple and competing discourses about gender roles embedded in curriculum materials, in teaching and learning styles and in discourses permeating the school from different sources – male and female teachers, school policies and norms, peers and parents. As Kamwendo (2010) identifies, global education policies or campaigning 'messages' about gender equality and the kinds of role that girls should adopt in order to be active agents may result in difficult negotiations with other conflicting gender roles and identities they perform within family, community and/or national contexts.

Investigating the gendered nature of the school curriculum offers insights into ways in which school knowledge and teaching and learning processes and relationships can reinforce, maintain and reproduce gender hierarchies. It also indicates approaches to transforming practices of curriculum and pedagogy. While national education policies may clearly subscribe to international discourses of gender equity and equality and include strong statements about the importance of mainstreaming gender through the system and its institutions, there are still few examples of curricula developed from a gendered analysis of society and both men's and women's expectations for the future. South African curriculum reform processes offer some insights into the challenges and complexities of such analysis (Morrell et al., 2009) but in many countries neither curriculum developers nor teachers have the necessary training or capacity to incorporate a gender analysis into their work and accommodate for example diverse learning styles for boys and girls (Velasco, 2004). Marshal and Arnot (2008) point to the need for historical and sociological analysis of national curricular norms, recognition of gendered forms of knowledge and their representation in curricula, and different types of gendered

performances within different school subjects. Where curriculum reform involves an abrupt and radical change from content-oriented teaching to learning outcomes based on prescribed lists of competencies, teachers are faced with new challenges about what they value as outcomes in the gendered environment of their classrooms (Balarin and Benavides, 2009).

In many countries textbooks are the mainstay of teaching and given priority in the classroom as sources of knowledge and values which privilege the knowledge of those who design and choose their content. The gendered discourse and the portrayal of gendered roles in textbooks are influential in shaping girls' and boys' experience of education (Barber et al., 2007). Women's representation in textbooks rarely reflects their changing positions and multiple roles and identities today, where they may be mothers and carers but also income earners and professionals. While, as Stromquist (2007) notes, there are moves to introduce gender and culturally sensitive manuals for teachers to help them adapt biased textbooks, and for curriculum development centres to represent women in new and challenging situations in textbooks or other teaching and learning materials, such moves may still encounter resistance from established gender hierarchies and institutional norms. The 1997 curriculum revision process in Cambodia sidestepped issues of gender and women's changing roles, preferring to leave non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and UNICEF to run special projects such as those for girls 'at risk' of sexual exploitation. Velasco (2004) considers that this approach has accelerated the dropout of girls in higher classes, especially in rural areas and amongst minority groups. Meanwhile, in another context, in Lao, a citizenship curriculum has been developed on the assumption that gender equality exists in society, replicating taken-for-granted inequalities in the process. Fox (2003) shows how this assumption acts to exclude the differently gendered practices of ethnic minority groups and their languages.

Girls' low achievement in mathematics and science subjects in school has long influenced teachers' and students' own expectations of their ability to perform. In Malawi girls' achievement in mathematics improved considerably when they were taught in single-sex schools and social conditions which had previously undermined girls' performance were removed (Croft, 2000). Segregation of male and female teachers can also have implications for girls' freedom to learn. Research into mathematics teaching in low-income schools in Pakistan shows that female teachers' low expectations of girls reflected dominant societal perceptions of gender roles, and that female teachers themselves were unable to model a confident self-image as mathematicians and had consistently lower qualifications than their male counterparts (Halai, 2011). Moreover, interventions designed to support a shift in gender perceptions showed no shift in gender attitudes and a general lack of ownership of gender awareness issues (Halai, 2011: 49).

Where the language of instruction in school is a national or international language, the potential to benefit from learning and becoming literate in this dominant language has gendered implications. Ames (2005), in her research in rural Peru, has illustrated how boys, as future heads of families, are seen to require Spanish literacy skills to manage a range of legal papers and negotiate with local and regional authorities, as well as for seasonal migration for work in towns and cities, while girls are not encouraged to learn Spanish. In indigenous communities, teachers from other parts of the country inculcate what they believe should be girls' agricultural and domestic roles, while failing to

validate the indigenous knowledges and skills embedded in and expressed through the girls' and boys' oral languages and oral practices (Aikman, 2002).

As the example of mathematics teachers above illustrated, female teachers themselves are embedded in societal and institutional cultures which are hierarchical, unequal and discriminatory. Croft's work in Malawi illustrates how women teachers' voices are rarely to be found in teaching materials, and curriculum documents ignore the experience and skills they have developed through their practice in the classroom (Croft, 2000). This issue is also raised by Kirk (2004) through interviews with teachers in Pakistan which emphasizes the importance of strategies to engage with women teachers and their knowledge of classroom processes and contexts for the development of quality policies and educational change. Current knowledge of the experiences of women teachers and how these are different to those of men are limited (Mitchell, 1995) and Kirk (2004) demonstrates a need for gendered theories of teaching and insights into how to connect with teachers' own gendered perspectives, concerns, experiences and challenges.

This section has begun to tease out some of the challenges to an instrumental, human capital approach and its limitations in terms of responses, policies and actions to promote gender equality in the classroom, looking particularly at understanding the gendered nature of the curriculum process and practice, and of teachers' lives and teachers' gendered professional practices. These examples offer contexts from which to begin to understand how institutional hierarchies of power, historically embedded relational inequalities and social, cultural and economic positioning shape, entrench and transform gender identities and girls' and boys' agency.

Conclusion

This review of a selection of the qualitative research literature has utilized frameworks which have moved beyond notions of gender equality in education as only concerning 'girls' and discussions of gender parity as creating conditions of sameness and equal numbers of boys and girls. It has highlighted ways in which political, social, economic and educational processes and structures are integral to understanding gendered inequalities as well as how these are constructed and perpetuated in culturally, socially, economically and historically diverse contexts. Attempts to make a curriculum more 'gender sensitive' in a school will founder if gendered inequalities that permeate the notion of society on which the curriculum has been developed go unrecognized or unchallenged, and while it may be laudable to expand basic education through the provision of private schooling, the longer-term pernicious consequences of gender stereotyping and gender bias should not be ignored. By taking an approach based in principles of justice and of human development, rather than an instrumental and fragmented list of inputs, this article has sought to approach educational quality more holistically using the notion of quality as a terrain over which the complex dynamics of gender inequalities are played out in a myriad of diverse contexts.

A major insight that emerges from this analysis, albeit based on a review of a limited range of literature, is that attaining gender-equitable quality education requires multi-faceted strategies that address not only different dimensions of girls' and women's lives, but understand gendered relationships and structurally entrenched inequalities between

women and men, girls and boys. Within South Asia, Sri Lanka's 'good performance' proves this point; taking account of issues of environment and experience simultaneously across different educational levels over a long period of time, and sustained by adequate expenditures, was crucial for universalizing education up to secondary levels (ASPBAE and UNGEI, 2010). Stipends and scholarships are not enough in the absence of learning processes that make the educational experience both valuable and empowering. The analysis needs to be wider – rather than identifying deficits and barriers and 'overcoming' these with isolated inputs, equality and how to achieve and sustain it for differently situated learners demands an analysis of forms of discrimination, and situated processes which perpetuate it, together with understandings of what kind of education learners value and how they can use it. This means working not with expectations of linear relationships between inputs of resources and learning outcomes but with disjunctures and inconsistencies in educational processes as they operate within the sphere of interact with wider societal dynamics.

Teachers are crucial actors in the terrain of quality, yet their agency and gendered identities are often neglected both as individuals and as professionals. Our review has indicated that attention to teachers, their training and functional infrastructure has also to be assessed. Policies and practices should be designed on the basis of an analysis of the relational dynamics and with recognition of the ways in which identities are interpreted and shaped through social and cultural processes. Similarly, other actors – parents, educational officials, headteachers, community leaders, among others – have gendered identities, roles and responsibilities which impact upon and intersect with those of learners inside and outside of school. While there are issues common across the countries from which we have taken our examples, there is also much diversity, which calls for approaches that look to understand the historical and spatial location of educational inequalities and how to overcome them.

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Notes

1. Governments committed to these goals during the EFA conference at Dakar in April 2000 and the Millennium Summit at New York in September 2000 respectively.
2. We do not have space to investigate issues of violence and abuse in this article but refer readers to papers from the E4 Conference on Gender Engendering Empowerment: Education and Equality 2010 (www.e4conference.org).

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