

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **One-hand clapping: Gender equality and its challenges in pastoralist secondary education in Afar region: A quality concern**

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One way of conceptualizing educational quality is that it is a function of effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness, equality, relevance and sustainability (Barrett et al. 2006). Quality education rejects gender discrimination and social injustice. Gender equality in Ethiopia, as an anchor of quality education, has long been explained numerically. The Annual Abstracts the Ministry of Education published each year do not clearly indicate the regions' Gender Parity Index (GPI). The lack of such kind of data made it difficult to see gender parity beyond numbers. Employing concurrent mixed method design, of about 2,934 student universe, 314 populated the sample using stratified random sampling. The results showed that the gender parity index for the region for 2016 is 0.52 in favor of boys with previous indices not more than 0.6. The gender parity index set in MDGs to be eliminated for 2015 is far from achievement. Inequality to access to education is found to perpetuate further forms of inequalities like differences in the learning process, academic achievement, and post-schooling opportunities all in favor of boys and men. Boys' advantages gained early in access and learning processes transform into disproportionately greater advantages in post-school opportunities subjecting girls and women into greater inequalities. Efforts to achieve equality in life outcomes has been challenged by several factors like lack of creation of gender sensitive schools and policies, societal attitude and awareness towards schooling, child labor, domestic works, weak school laws that did not annul gender biases, and economy of the student or parents. The creation and development of gender sensitive schools with regulations that outlaw gender biases, the development and administration of gender policies, the creation of awareness on society-wide approach are some of the recommendations made.

**Key words:** Gender, equality, challenges.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The global community has long been interested in finding ways to improve access to high quality education at all

levels, from pre-primary through tertiary. Education is a fundamental human right – one that all individuals are entitled to enjoy whatever the circumstances in which they live – that also brings important benefits to human

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society as a whole. The level of knowledge and skills that individuals need to function as workers, citizens and fulfilled individuals in the global society is increasing. All countries, whatever their stage of development, view education as a cornerstone for economic development. An educated citizenry is also a key to social and political stability within and between nations (UNESCO, 2012).

From the outset, the global community has recognized that educating girls and women is an imperative, not only as a matter of respecting a basic human right for half the population but as a powerful and necessary first step to achieving the broader goals of education for all in general and gender equality in particular.

The education and training policy articulates that Ethiopia's education system is entangled with complex problems of relevance, quality, accessibility and equity (MoE, 1994). These problems of the education system, being interrelated, have been the focus of series of interventions and improvement for about the last two decades. Equity and equality in education, being used interchangeably in the education system, may denote absence of discrimination on the basis of any ground.

Many sociologists try providing conceptualizations of gender, the most comprehensive one of them could be contributed by Itzin and Newman (1995). By gender they mean that,

*.....the socially constructed and culturally determined characteristics associated with women and men, the assumptions made about the skills and abilities of women and men based on these characteristics, the conditions in which women and men live and work, the relations that exist between women and men, and how these are represented, communicated, transmitted and maintained. It includes sexual and social relations, relations based on sexuality, and relations of power and control based on gender (p. 2).*

Worldwide, it became a major outcome of the world conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien in 1990, and was reconfirmed in a series of summits throughout the following decades. The World Education Forum (2000) agreed on six Education for All (EFA) goals which are considered to be achievable. Among these six goals, Goal 2 and Goal 5 pertain to equality (and quality) of education. Goal 2 states "ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality" and Goal 5 "eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality".

According to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2010), women participation in education is constrained by

economic, socio-cultural, familial, personal and school factors. The economic problems relate to parents' inability to send girl children to school especially if schools are far from home or girls drop out due to lack of finances. The problem is more serious in rural areas, particularly in pastoralist regions. The traditional division of labor in homes constrains girls' success in education. School distance and harassment, feelings of discomfort to participate equally with men are stumbling blocks for female students particularly in pastoralist regions (like Afar).

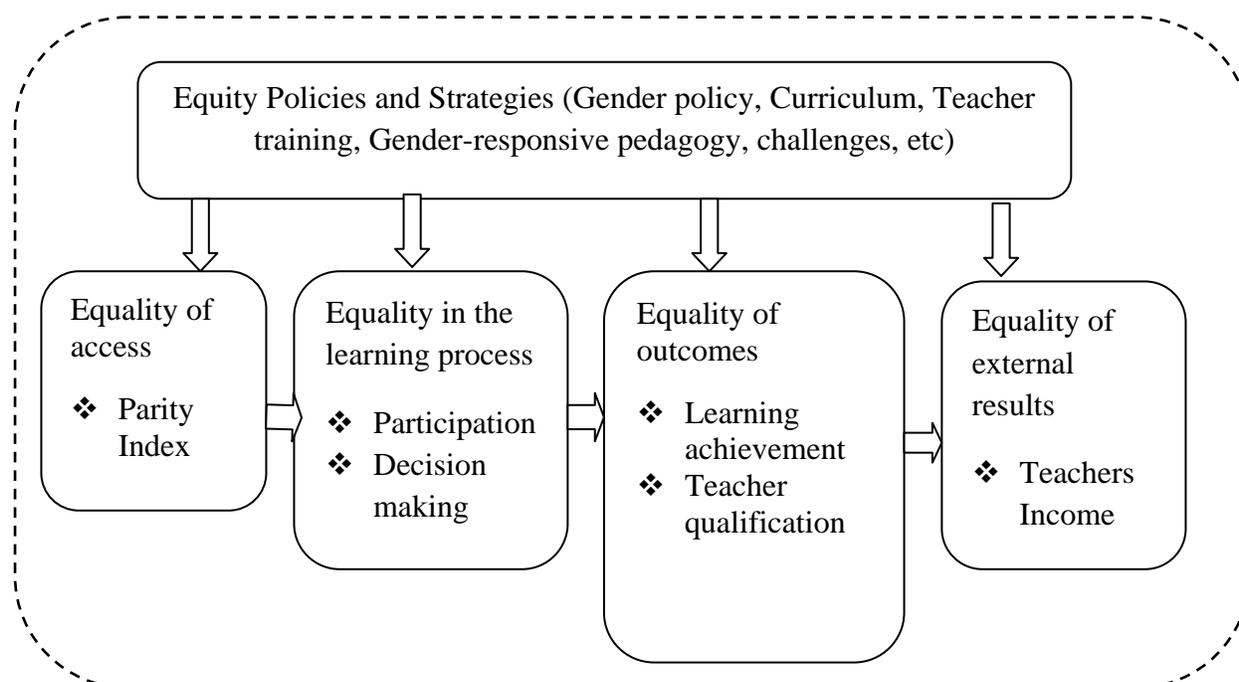
The Annual Abstract of the ministry does not clearly indicate the GER and NER for the regions. The lack of such kind of data made it difficult to see the gender parity in the region. Thus, this paper will find out the equality of education in secondary schools in Afar Region. To this end, it measures equality of access proxied by gender parity and estimates whether there is equality of participation in the learning process, equality of outcomes and equality of external results.

### **Statement of the problem**

Based on school effectiveness and improvement model, Barrett et al. (2006) conceptualize educational quality as a function of effectiveness, efficiency, responsiveness, equality, relevance and sustainability. In efforts to analyze equality in education systems worldwide, one prominent sect stands out: gender equality.

Quality education requires gender-sensitive use of human resources, and consideration of gender in the allocation of finances. Quality education entails a concern to include the views of all members of a community – boys and girls, men and women, taking context into account. Gender equality, therefore, is a sine qua non of quality education. A quality education rejects gender discrimination and social injustice. Quality education cannot be achieved without gender equality and equity (Aikman and Unterhalter, 2005).

However, gender equality or sometimes called parity, in Ethiopian education system has long been explained using gender parity index, a numerical concept. Millennium Development Goals stated as "eliminate gender disparity in primary, secondary and tertiary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015" have been measured by this index. The statistics however show that it is not likely that this target will be met. Some countries have actually witnessed a worsening of the situation (Siegel, 2005; Unterhalter, 2005). While there are encouraging moves towards increased parity in some countries, in many others, including Ethiopia, the gap in favor of boys is wide (Unterhalter, 2005). UNICEF estimates that across all developing countries the gender gap is 10 percentage points (UNICEF, 2003).



**Figure 1.** Modified dynamic framework for gender equality in education.

In fact, meaningful gender equality explanations go beyond numbers to consider socially constructed views of gender in a given natural setting. Full gender equality would imply that girls and boys are offered the same chances to school and that they enjoy teaching methods and curricula free of stereotypes and counseling unaffected by gender bias. It also implies equality of outcomes in terms of length of schooling learning achievement and academic qualifications and more broadly equal job opportunities and earnings for similar qualifications and experience (UNESCO, 2003).

Drawing on UNESCO (2003)'s framework of conceptualizing gender equality, this study would measure gender equality in secondary pastoralist education of Afar region, together with pinpointing challenges in the process of promoting gender equality. The achievement of full gender equality in education would imply (1) equality of opportunities, measured in gender parity index and teachers' attitudes towards equality in schools (2) equality in the learning process, measured by students' participation in learning activities, group work and club leadership, curricula, decision making, and use of school resources; (3) equality of outcomes, measured by academic achievement, length of school careers, academic qualifications and diplomas would not differ by gender; (4) equality of external results, in terms of earnings of men and women with similar qualifications and experience.

Besides, tackling gender disparities in all these

processes in secondary school is not without challenges. Thus, what would these challenges actually be in our context is also central to the study. To this end, the paper examines gender equality and its challenges under the following framework (Figure 1).

### Research questions

The study assesses the gender equality of secondary education in Afar region by raising the following research questions:

1. What is the status of gender parity for secondary schools in Afar region?
2. How are gender differences explained in the learning process (treatment), learning outcomes (academic achievement), and external results explained in Afar secondary schools?
3. What are the challenges faced in the efforts to achieving gender equality in Afar region secondary schools?

### Gender equality in education

The lack of a universally accepted definition of gender equality in educational goals makes measuring progress towards its achievement hard if not impossible

(Subrahmanian, 2005). Though Aikman and Unterhalter (2005) argue that “its precise meaning in relation to education is often unclear”, gender equality, in this context, refers to the right to access and participate in education, as well as to benefit from gender sensitive educational environments, processes and achievements, while obtaining meaningful education outcomes that link education benefits with social and economic life (UNESCO, 2016).

Gender parity, a purely numerical concept, implies that the same proportion of boys and girls – relative to their respective age groups – would enter the education system and participate in its different cycles. It reflects ‘formal’ equality, in terms of access to education. ‘Formal’ equality can also be understood as equality that is ‘premised on the notion of the ‘sameness’ of men and women, where the male actor is held to be the norm (Subrahmanian, 2005).

However, this measure is a narrow indicator. One is that the gross enrollment ratio can sometimes be more than 100% if there are large numbers of under-age and over-age pupils in school. Besides, it only gives us a picture of the number of children on the school register. In addition, because in many countries children’s births are not registered, net enrollment rate is often based on estimations (Unterhalter et al., 2005). Secondly, gender parity on its own cannot tell us much about gender equality in relation to accessing education, progressing through school, and living in a gender-equitable society after school (UNESCO, 2003). Thirdly, gender parity is inadequate measures of gender equality, because it does not acknowledge context (UNESCO, 2011).

If not closely examined, the indicator might also lead to interpretation problem in reporting progress. A GPI between 0.97 and 1.03 is considered as reflecting gender parity. Movement of GPI towards 1 could reflect rapidly increasing enrollment of girls, thus catching up with boys, whose enrollment rates are either staying the same, increasing slowly or declining. On the other hand, movement of GPI towards 1 could reflect declining enrollments, with boys’ enrollment declining much more rapidly than girls’ enrollment (Subrahmanian, 2005).

The second measure of gender equality is the gender-related EFA index (GEI), developed by UNESCO as an attempt to indicate the extent to which boys and girls are equally present at different levels in the education system (primary, secondary, and adult education). It is the arithmetical mean of the Gender Parity Indices for the primary and secondary gross enrollment ratios and the adult literacy rates. However, a country can have a GEI of 1, indicating complete equality between boys and girls, but still have low rates of access, retention, and achievement for girls and boys.

A third indicator, Education Development Index (EDI) is an attempt to bring together information on access, quality, and the gender gap. The index aggregates such

indicators as universal primary education (net enrollment ratio), adult literacy (literacy rate of the group aged 15 and over), gender (gender-specific EFA index) and progression (survival rate to grade 5). The index primarily considers gender in relation to access and not achievement (Unterhalter et al., 2005).

However, Reeves and Baden (2000) argue that the focus on what is sometimes called formal equality, does not necessarily demand or ensure equality of outcomes. It assumes that once the barriers to participation are removed, there is a level playing field. It does not recognize that women’s reality and experience may be different from men’s.

A more broader and contextual view of equality is substantive equality: equality in life outcomes. A move towards substantive gender equality thus requires recognizing that discrimination arises from differential valuation of what it is men and women contribute, giving rise, therefore, to differential investments in rewards, and resources for, women and men (Subrahmanian, 2005). In order to achieve equality of life outcomes, institutional arrangements, strategies, policies and should be designed. These are collectively referred as equity strategies. They range from affirmative action, through the development of gender sensitive policies, strategies and administrative units to deliver implementation outcomes, to organizational arrangements that allow positive discrimination.

Gender equity is, therefore, the means to achieve equality. Equity programs favor treating women and men differently in order to achieve the equal status of women and men. Such programs are based on the premise that if women and men were treated the same way (equally) there would be a risk of reaching unfair outcomes due to original disparities (UNESCO, 1999).

The development and implementation of equity strategies or programs, however, require an analysis of social and cultural relations and the opportunity for dialogue, debate, and the exploration of differences, particularly with regard to the public–private interface. Only in-depth analysis paves the way for the development equity strategies instrumental for the removal of deeply embedded obstacles and structures of power and exclusion, such as discriminatory laws, customs, practices, and institutional processes, all of which undermine opportunities and outcomes in education (Unterhalter, 2005).

In sum, gender equality is not a number game as the disparities start early, legitimized through the social structure, and run deep. Thus, gender equality studies involving quantitative data might show high levels of gender equality in access and progression, but qualitative findings must enhance understanding of gender related variables that hamper or promote the achievement of full gender equality in education. It is insights from qualitative accounts that isolate effectiveness of gender equity

strategies (if any), challenges faced in promoting equality in schools together with other society-context realities, requiring natural and holistic approaches to study.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Design of the study

This study employs parallel mixed methods design since it allows explanation of alternative perspectives that would have been missed if either qualitative or quantitative designs were used alone. In this design, the two types of data are collected at the same time and analyzed concurrently (Mertens, 2010; Creswell, 2009, 2014). In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected to see the equality of gender in access to schooling, equality of the learning process, equality of the learning outcomes, and equality of the external results gained from schooling in the context of Afar region secondary schools.

### Population and sample size

The population for this sample is the universe of government secondary students and teachers in secondary school in Afar region. High schools from seven weredas in the region are selected randomly. These are Awash, Abala, Hadelala, Chifra, Gewanie, Milie and Addaar. Based on report written by the Afar Regional Education Bureau 2009, the number of students is 2,934. The appropriate sample size for this population is 314 (at  $\alpha = .05$ ). Thus, students who filled the questionnaire were selected using stratified random sampling. Teachers who participated in FGDs were selected purposively to get rich information.

### Materials (Instruments of data collection)

In this study, three data gathering methods are used. These are questionnaires, FGDs, and documents analysis. Two sets of questionnaires, one for teachers and principals and the other for students, were developed to explain equality of participation in access to schooling, the learning process, equality of outcomes and equality of external results.

### Measures

Gender Parity Index (GPI) is a known measure of gender equality of access to schooling. It is the proportion of enrollment of girls to boys. A value of less than one indicates differences in favor of boys, whereas a value near one indicates that parity has been more or less achieved.

With the same train of thought, equality in the learning process, learning outcomes, and in external results is estimated by dividing mean of each variable of girls for boys, following the same way of interpretation as gender parity index.

### Methods of data analysis

In this study, the data collected are described quantitatively as well as qualitatively using descriptions, categories and themes. More specifically, teachers' qualification is described in percentage to see if it demonstrates gender equality of the school staff composition

(UNESCO, 2003). To see if boys and girls, men and women have disparities in the learning process, academic achievement, and external results proxied by salary, ratio of the mean is calculated for an ideal index of one, alike that of enrollment. On the other strand of analysis, the raw data from FGDs, documents and reports are organized using coding, categorizing and building themes.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

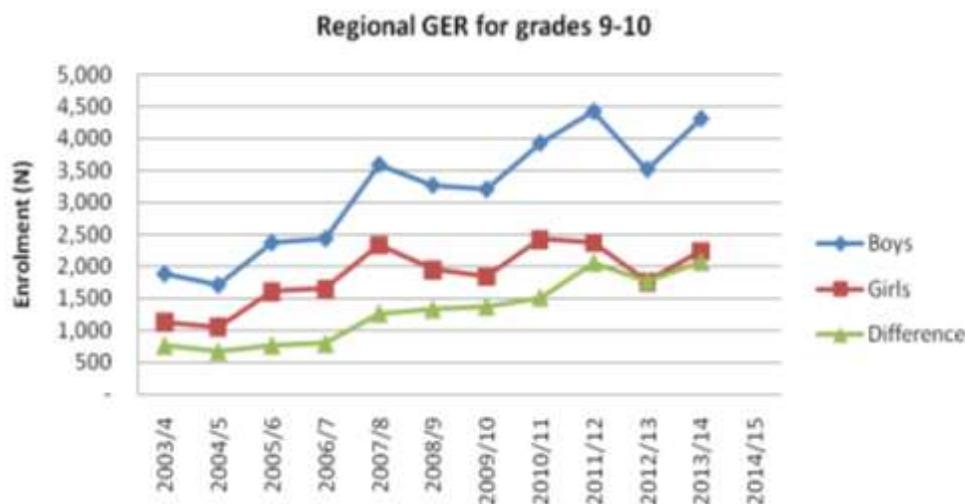
Gender equality implies that males and females have equal opportunities to realize their full human rights and contribute to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political development (USAID, 2008). Full gender equality in education would imply that girls and boys are offered the same chances to go to school and that they enjoy teaching methods and curricula free of stereotypes, and academic orientation and counseling unaffected by gender bias. Most fundamentally, it implies equality of outcomes in terms of length of schooling, learning achievement and academic qualifications and, more broadly, equal job opportunities and earnings for similar qualifications and experience (UNESCO, 2004). This discussion examines gender equality in afar pastoralist secondary schools from access to qualification and earnings.

### Equality of access to schooling

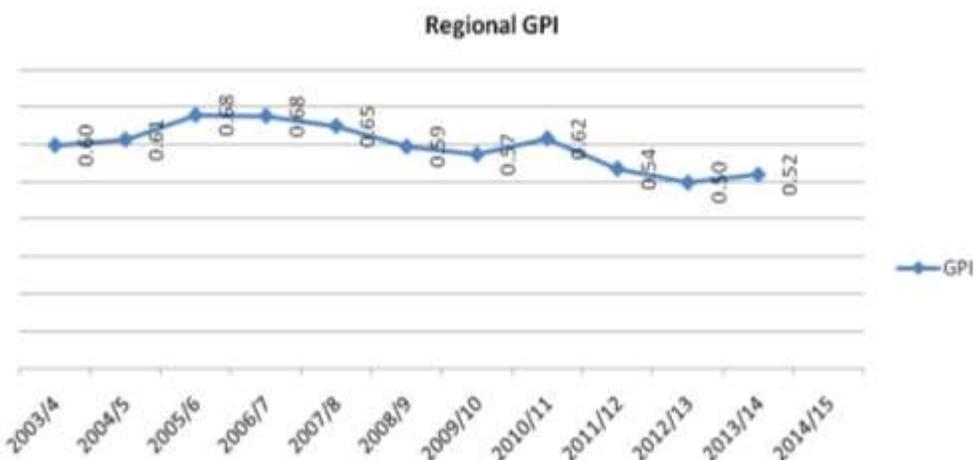
Among these six Millennium Development Goals, Goals 2 and 5 pertain to equality in quality education: "Goal 2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality". The other goal specifies the time frame and area of gender equality: equality of access and achievement (learning outcomes) to quality schooling. Goal 5 aims to "eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality".

Figure 2 shows that while the enrollment was on a steady rise for both, it evidences widening in the gap in later years. The gender gap between boys and girls seem to grow constantly which indicates the reinforcement of gender disparities in the region than closing the gap.

Figure 3 shows that GPI is decreasing for later years. This is due to steady increase in boys' enrollment which is not accompanied by similar increases in girls' own. The difference is widening because more boys enroll to schools than girls for grades 9-10. Though it is on increasing trend, because of small increases, gender parity is not yet achieved. The year for the achievement of gender parity is long gone, 2005. For an education system a GPI between 0.97 and 1.03 is considered as



**Figure 2.** Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for Grades 9-10. Source: Ministry of Education Annual Abstracts (2000-2015).



**Figure 3.** Gender Parity Index taking GER for Grades 9-10. Source: Ministry of Education Annual Abstracts; 2000-2015).

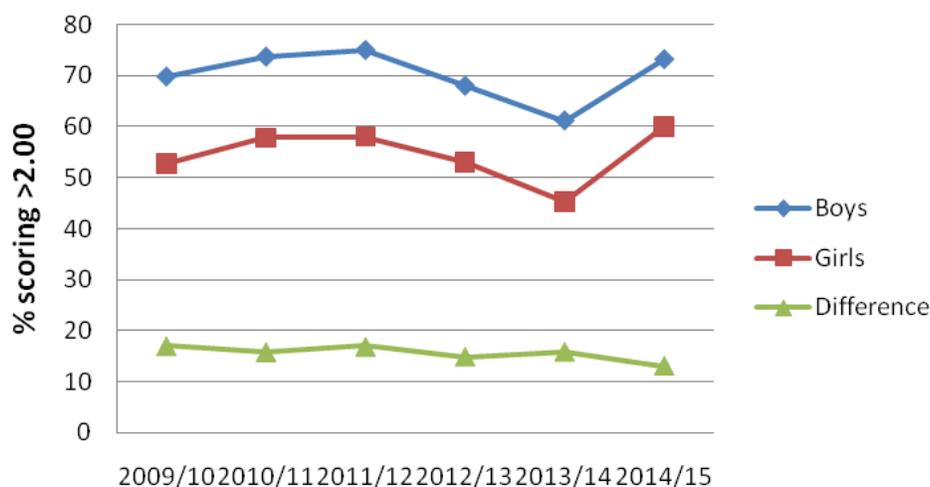
reflecting gender parity. The region, after 13 years of the year for parity (2005) is still 48% behind for grades 9-10. This implies that almost half of the girls who should have got access to secondary education (grade 9-10) are out of school. Thus, the number of boys almost doubles that of girls.

**Equality in the learning process**

Research has it that male students tended to have more teacher-student interaction opportunities in both elementary and junior high schools. Male students responded to teacher-initiated questions more by being

called on or by calling out. There are a few female students who raised their hands for being called on by teachers. Also they did not take the opportunities for responses by calling out before teachers' pointing to them as male students did (Jung and Chung, 2005).

Thus, equality in the learning process can be viewed in terms of learner participation, decision making and distribution of learning resources among boys and girls. It is found that participation shows a gender difference of 0.61 in favor of boys (the ratio of participation score of girls which is 2152 to boys which is 3525). Likewise, decision making in school affairs shows a gender parity of 0.66 in favor of boys (the ratio of decision making score of girls which is 1025 to boys which is 1546).



**Figure 4.** Grade 10 score on national exam.  
Source: Education Statistics Annual Abstract, MoE (2016).

The equitable distribution of teaching learning material for boys and girls can also be a measure of equality. A similar gender difference appears with 0.65 in favor of boys (the ratio of teaching learning materials score of girls which is 520 to boys which is 789, N=150 males and 150 females).

### Equality of learning outcomes

Studies indicate that one area of gender disparity is academic achievement, in almost all cases in favor of boys. Eddy et al. (2014) compared academic achievement of boys and girls using data from 23 large introductory biology classes. They found that females consistently underperform on exams compared with males with similar overall college grade point averages.

Students' academic score published on Annual Abstracts (MoE, 2016) for grade 10 show a similar disparity among boys and girls. Boys scored a higher mean consistently over the years indicating the gender difference is kept unaltered, with no equity strategies in action. Despite keeping this gender difference, the scores across years show both increases at some time and decreases at other times. By all means, boys appear to score higher than girls (Figure 4).

National Learning Assessments (MoE, 2012) were also considered to determine gender disparity in academic achievement. It shows that Grade 10 girls in most subjects score consistently lower than boys, except physics. On average, girls score three points lower than boys, with the largest difference in math (4.8 points).

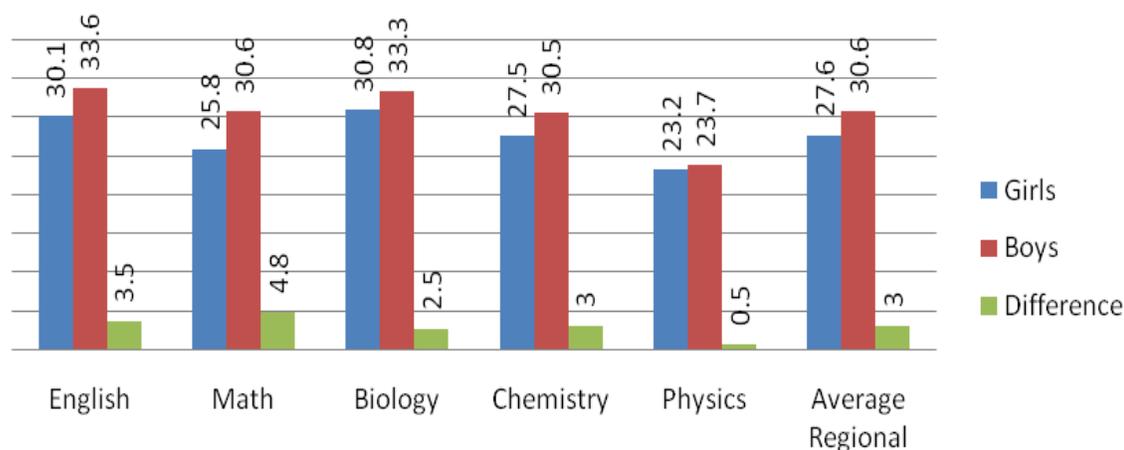
However, students' average scores on teacher made tests in sample schools indicate that girls perform better

than boys in all subjects (boys mean = 61.7 (N=260); girls mean 63.4 (N=262)). Girls and boys achieve very different outcomes in school, not just in overall performance but also by subject. UNESCO (2016) identifies significant subject-based gender inequalities in learning achievements. Male students have performed better in mathematics (Figure 5) while female students perform better in reading and writing.

In sum, research shows inconsistent results on gendered achievement differences. This could be the problem of aggregating the scores and the dependability of scores as a measure. Nikel and Lowe (2010) argue that students' achievement entails a restricted interpretation. Hanushek and Wubmann (2007) raise threats of validity and reliability of tests arguing that test scores are prone to considerable measurement error because of substantial errors in each test. Thus, as learning is all about behavioral change, which is qualitative, approaches that give more dependable interpretation, shall be researched.

### Equality of external results

Equality of external results is achieved when the status of men and women; their access to goods and resources; and their ability to contribute to, participate in, and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and political activities are equal. This implies that career opportunities, the time needed to secure employment after leaving full-time education, and the earnings of men and women with similar qualifications and experience are equal. While there is no guarantee that outcomes will be the same for those with the same level of education, ideally, equality in



**Figure 4.** Gender difference in Academic achievement. Grade 10 NLA: Afar region. Source: MoE (2012).

the educational process “unlocks equal opportunities for men and women post-schooling” (UNESCO, 2005)

Gender gaps are evident among farmers, entrepreneurs, and employees alike. Because of gender-specific constraints, female workers tend to have lower output and income. Schooling *per se* does not guarantee equality in the world of work. Gender stereotypes and streaming in education can reinforce occupational segregation; significant educational achievements have not closed significant gender gaps in the workforce.

Researchers have studied participation of female residents in scientific and vocational education and careers, underlying reasons for inequalities. Joseph (1998) found that girls who wished to participate in science, technology, engineering and math activities and careers were actively discouraged by teachers and harassed by male classmates. They also found that most parents felt that gender inequality in science, technology, and engineering and math activities as “inevitable”.

In the sampled weredas, it is difficult to collect data for statistical test because of the fewer number of teachers in these schools. Male teachers dominate the schools. Of 63 teachers, only 14 (22%) are females. However, monthly income shows great disparity in the schools: 0.77 in favor of male teachers’ salaries. Thus, the fewer number of female teachers reinforces inequitable resources and income within the school system. Thus, schools in these weredas are not girls friendly and maintain a male-dominated culture.

One indicator potentially important for gendered outcomes in schooling is the proportion of primary-school teachers who are females: “Countries, with roughly equal proportions of male and female primary teachers, also tend to have rough equality in primary school intake between boys and girls” (UNESCO, 2003:60). There is evidence that teachers’ attitudes and perceptions reveal

harmful biases, teachers’ expectations are different for boys and girls and teacher-pupil interactions perpetuate differences (UNESCO, 2007). Thus, there is strong suggestive evidence that moves towards equalizing gender balance among teachers will promote gender parity.

In Afar region, 78% of the teachers are men and only 22% are women, showing a gender difference of 50%. Female teachers in such secondary schools in this pastoralist region are about three times lower than male teachers. Besides, 84% of first degree qualifications in these schools are males while 16% are females. Of diploma holders, 61% are male teachers and 30% are females. This tells us that school system shows differences in favor of men both in qualifications and also representation (female teachers being under-represented). The number of female teaching staff still remains under-represented in almost all levels of the education system (MoE, 2010).

### Challenges to achieving gender equality

It is no doubt the realization of gender equality within the education system has multiple, complex and interrelated challenges that are breathtaking. Trying to address all the challenges faced with adequate depth will be beyond the scope of this research. However, as the paper tries to see gender equality in its entirety in the school context, mentioning some of the challenges as viewed by those making the struggle will be proper.

Challenges are many, deep rooted, and interrelated, which call for series of studies. For this paper, one of the most critical challenges is the absence of gender-sensitive policy throughout the education system. This has kept the disparity inertia long established to run deeper than being tackled. The Education and training

policy only contains the phrase “gender issues” at once. Strategy for gender equity in education and training sector (MoE, 2013) sets equity strategies like targeted and systematic expansion of schools to the rural and disadvantaged, alternative modalities, mobilizing the community, addressing severe socio-economic hindrances, systematizing subsidies and preferential resources for vulnerable and girls from poor households, gender responsive pedagogy, among others.

However, effective strategies capture the voices of the disadvantaged. They must be grounded within social and contextual realities. Besides, it does not address the strategic and practical gender needs. To Moser (2003), practical gender needs are concerns with immediate day-to-day requirements like food, water, and shelter while strategic gender interests are concerns with challenging the deeply entrenched forms of gender discrimination in the legal system, sexual violence in the family, the lack of political representation, and discrimination in the workplace.

Moreover, gender responsive pedagogy is not even part of teacher training programs. “Gender responsive pedagogy will be part of teacher education programs in higher learning institutions and teacher education colleges as part of pre-service and continuous professional development” (MoE, 2013) is not practical yet. Finally, there are no administrative arrangements organized at all levels of the system to manage gendered interests. This has created schools where gender disparities are reinforced rather than creating gender sensitive schools which can be models for other social institutions on gender equality.

The other challenge is the economics of schooling and enrollment. Most girls could not put themselves in school as they have no money to support their lives. Such harsh economic circumstances leave parents unwilling or unable to financially support their daughters’ education.

Besides, school location is key to access. Girls in remote areas are left alone because of long school distance, affecting more girls than boys, increasing the probability of dangers like sexual harassment. Location prevented girls from accessing educational opportunities, including: geographic barriers and difficulties of physical access, which influence female students more than males. The absence of gender responsive pedagogy trainings for teachers, lack of effort to establish gender sensitive or girl’s friendly schools on the part of the wereda are some of the challenges.

Moreover, cultural beliefs and practices that favor boys and adversely affect the opportunities afforded to girls; child labor, with laborious domestic work with poor feeding and sexual harassment. Besides carrying the burden of domestic activities, girls could also be a breadwinner for their families.

In line with such a belief lies on “son preferencing” – the attitude that parents choose to give birth to sons, and

give their sons, than girls, greater power in decisions at home and also send boys to schools than girls. It is, therefore, essential to take societal and empowerment approaches from home to school to achieve full gender equality in education. “Countries in which there is strong cultural preference for sons also tend to have the greatest gender inequalities” UNESCO, 2003:18).

Long-held negative attitudes about women’s intellectual capabilities, poor management of sexual maturation, teenage pregnancy, and traditional division of household labor also are among the deeply embedded challenges that impede achieving gender equality in education.

## Conclusion

Gender Inequality has continued to negatively affect female participation on every dimension of development. Setting and pursuing developmental goals without addressing one of its anchors – gender disparity- is like driving cart with two unequal wheels: one bigger and the other smaller. Would the cart move forward? No. It rotates in a limited circle.

Equality of access between boys and girls to schooling is not yet achieved: the region, after 13 years of the year for parity (2005) in MDGs is still 28% behind for grades 9-10, even if this numeric measure is not a sufficient condition to explain equality. As the GPI for the region is 0.52 in favor of boys, it means that 48% of girls are out of school if we assume that all boys are in schools. It is also known that female teachers are under-represented in schools. This led the school to develop male dominated culture where inequalities are reinforced. The learning process also tends to have been favored for boys than girls in terms of participation, distribution of teaching learning resources, and decision making in the school system. Girls seem to perform as well as or lower than boys but different by subject though national exam score aggregates still reflect disparity in favor of boys. Lastly, post-schooling job earnings for teachers in high school indicate differences implying that most school systems are not girls-friendly, thereby reinforcing an already established deeply engrained gender stereotyping. The challenges faced include economy, location, child labor, domestic work, absence of gender responsive pedagogy trainings, lack of effort to establish gender sensitive or girls friendly schools, son-preferencing and the social beliefs that have long been established would not allow the effort to narrow the gaps. Thus, gender equality in Afar secondary education is far from closing the gap if not more severe than ever. The advantages gained by boys starting at the level of access, keep momentum in transforming into disproportionately greater advantages in the process and outcomes of schooling, putting girls into greater disadvantages. The education system has ignored the notion of equality beyond parity, the

development and administration of gender policies that halt the existing stereotype. It considers parity as a sufficient measure of equality without looking into the limitations associated with it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The ministry of education should establish administrative measures, at all levels, for schools and office administrators including parents to together to attract more girls to the school ensure that at least equality of access to enrollment is achieved. This can be done by creating gender sensitive schools.

Gender strategies pertaining to teacher training programs are loose. Gender related courses are not included in higher education and teacher education colleges as part of the academic qualification. Weak gender responsive pedagogy has heightened the gender inequity (MoE, 2010). Thus, making gender responsive pedagogy part of teacher education programs in higher learning institutions and teacher education colleges as part of pre-service and continuous professional development programs is crucial.

Addressing gender issues should begin with a gender-awareness approach, rather than focusing on simple measurement of equality of access to schooling (GPI), which challenges traditional assumptions about female teachers, their place in the home, society and the teaching profession. Schools could become gender sensitive and the existing power structure shall be altered to better reflect women's practical and strategic needs.

Improving monetary and non-monetary incentives, offering more flexible schedules and accommodations, offering local recruitment and training and other more friendly environments, and codifying rules and regulation that outlaw inequalities to bring more female teachers to schools, to school leadership positions, and facilitate the creation of gender sensitive schools call for stakeholders' attention. Schools shall be created in a way their environment supports the development of every learner.

Future research should focus on ensuring gender equality, not only for learners but also for teachers and education administrators. The research community should design approaches to reveal deeply embedded gender inequalities that go beyond numerical aggregations.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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