

GENDER ISSUES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MALAWI

By

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Background

In the early 90s, Malawi took a rights based approach to address gender issues in educational institutions. This was in response to disparities in persistence, performance and achievement between boys and girls in schools. Gender issues were identified as a force towards the disparities.

Enrollment, persistence, performance and achievement

- Education statistics show that more girls than boys enroll at the beginning of primary education and their performance is equal to that of boys or higher.
- More girls begin dropping out of school by the time they reach standard 5 at age around 14-15.
- Girls performance significantly drops and they lag behind boys in many subjects more especially in science.

Cont...

- Fewer girls proceed to secondary school and continue to perform lower than boys.

Gender

- Gender is a socially and culturally constructed ideology that influences one to identify her/himself as female or male. Society creates gender and determines its purposes. It is applied to control behaviours in different settings.
- FAWE (1998)

Gender issue

- Gender becomes an issue when it causes inequalities on how males and females perform different tasks.

Gender issues in education

- Gender issues in education are manifested through disparities between boys and girls on school attendance, persistence, performance and achievement.

Origins of gender issues in education

- **Socio-cultural factors:**

- beliefs, attitudes and practices that are deep rooted in culture;

- unequal gender power relations between males and females

- stereotyping of roles

Origins cont...

- **Economic factors:** related to socio-cultural, some families in the rural and peri-urban with poor or low income opt to invest in educating a boy child believing that he will be the breadwinner.

Gender issues in Malawi secondary schools

There are many issues that affect the education of both boys and girls in secondary schools some of which are:

- Gendered practices demonstrated in the classroom seating arrangements, lining up at the assembly and differential school chores for boys and girls;
- Gender imbalance on the teaching staff- male teachers outnumbering female teachers

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Issues in education cont...

- **Harassment:**

Different forms of harassment affecting both boys and girls but more critical on girls.

- **School facilities:**

Inadequate toilet facilities for girls' personal hygiene.

Teaching subjects:

Fewer girls than boys opting for basic science subjects due to low numbers of female basic sciences teachers.

Classroom issues

- Differential expectations on female and male students resulting in unequal treatment of female and male students in classroom encounters.
- Gender bias and sexist language that can be humiliating- '***you don't have to shout your answer as if you are a boy***' a comment that was made to a standard one girl.

Classroom issues cont...

‘ boys, how can you allow girls to beat you in the Maths test’

Issues in Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS)

- Critical teacher shortages
- Under qualified teachers
- Insufficient infrastructure
- Long distances to schools critically affecting girls

Steps taken to address gender issues in education

- Establishment of a Gender Appropriate Curriculum unit at Malawi Institute of Education (MIE);
- The National Gender policy
- Introduction of Life Skills subject
- Introducing more basic science subjects as core in the new curriculum

Addressing gender issues through curriculum

- Aligning the programme with the new secondary school curriculum
- Integrating gender concerns in the training materials
- A strong gender component in the curriculum
- Methods and techniques that apply the principles of active learning and critical thinking

Addressing gender issues cont...

- Emphasis on moving away from the traditional lecturing to interactive lecturing
- Building capacities of lecturers to equip them with the essential skills to enable them use the critical pedagogical approaches that makes learning meaningful and fun
- Methods and techniques should be modeled by lecturers and not just be taught

Addressing gender issues cont...

- Using meta-teaching (teaching about teaching) technique to students to better understand the teaching and learning methods and techniques.

END

Questions for discussion

1. Considering the steps that have been taken to address gender issues in education, why is there very little improvement?
2. What structural gaps still remain?
3. What is it that needs to be done?

Questions cont...

4. Is there need for policy restructuring?