

Special Issue: Gender Equality and Education

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Editorial by Johny Daniel and Nadia Siddiqui

This special issue presents a compilation of scholarly articles on gender equality in education. This issue is particularly timely, aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5, which emphasises the importance of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. As the United Nations asserts, 'Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world' (United Nations, 2023).

Despite significant progress, numerous obstacles impede the full realisation of gender equality in educational environments. These range from differential access to educational resources, gender stereotypes, to disparities in academic and career outcomes. One stark indicator of these persistent inequalities is reflected in UNICEF's estimation, which states that approximately 129 million girls globally are not attending school. This figure includes around 32 million girls of primary school age, 30 million in lower-secondary school, and 67 million in upper-secondary school (UNICEF, n.d.).

The articles in this special issue explore these challenges, offering both critical analysis and innovative solutions. Our contributors, who come from diverse academic and geographical backgrounds, provide rich, multidimensional perspectives on the subject. Their work illuminates how gender inequality in education perpetuates societal inequities and hinders the development of individuals and communities. These articles highlight the problems and showcase research and practices that demonstrate progress, challenge stereotypes, and offer insights into creating more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

As readers engage with this issue, it is our hope that they will be inspired to reflect critically on their own roles in promoting gender equality, to appreciate the complexity of the issues at hand, and to recognise the power of education as a transformative tool. The pursuit of gender equality in education is not just an academic concern; it is a societal imperative that calls for concerted effort, nuanced understanding and persistent advocacy.

We selected five articles that contribute important discussion on gender inequalities in specific country contexts. Each article offers a unique perspective, employing diverse methodologies to explore the nuances of gender dynamics in educational settings.

Vergara et al. (2023): This timely article delves into the gender disparities in the digital competence and usage of information and communication technologies (ICT) among Latin American professors during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study, based on a survey of 1062 professors, reveals intriguing findings: although the pandemic has homogenised the frequency of ICT use in teaching activities, a gender gap persists. The article emphasises the need for universities to develop digital training plans that support an egalitarian integration of ICT, addressing the challenges posed by insufficient digital competence.

Yeoh and Cheong (2023): This study explores the perceptions of gender stereotyping in children's literature used in Malaysian English as second language (ESL) classrooms. Through focus groups with children and interviews with experienced ESL teachers, the study uncovers a surprising underemphasis on gender stereotypes, despite children's readiness to discuss gender-related issues. Highlighting the potential for agency in

pedagogical review and gender advocacy, this article calls for more gender-balanced reading materials and explicit discussions on gender in teaching and learning.

Majerski (2024): This critical ethnographic case study offers a powerful critique of the neoliberal restructuring in academia, focusing on the institutional responses to discrimination and harassment against a woman. The concept of genocidal mobbing is introduced, illustrating how misogynistic administrative practices and student privilege perpetuate gender-based violence and inequality. This provocative article urges a re-evaluation of university and union policies to better protect and represent women faculty, especially those marginalised by multiple intersectional identities.

Donovan et al. (2023): Donovan and colleagues provide a ground-breaking analysis of the hidden curriculum in English schools that influences students' understanding of gender and sexuality. Utilising participatory action research with young people, this study examines the regulatory mechanisms of gender and sexuality in schools and the resistance against essentialist narratives. It advocates for schools to become active spaces where young people can critically engage with and dismantle entrenched gender and sexual norms.

Daniel and Wang (2023): This study addresses the critical issue of gender disparities in the identification of special educational needs in England. Utilising extensive government data, the authors present descriptive analysis of how gender differences manifest across various disability categories, regions and educational phases. Their findings point to a persistent under-identification of female students, raising important questions about equity in receiving timely educational support services.

In aligning with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5, which advocates for gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, this issue echoes the UN's aspiration for a balanced and fair world. By highlighting the intricate and varied facets of gender equality in education, these articles contribute to the global discourse, supporting the UN's objective of ending gender-based discrimination. We hope the articles serve as a reflection towards a future where gender equality in education is not just an ideal, but a universal truth.

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