

# Gender Equity in Education\*

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## Abstract

Numerous studies show that society often treats boys and girls differently. Although gender inequalities in education have changed much in recent decades thanks to the fight for women's rights, inequity between the sexes continues to flourish nowadays. This article focuses on how and why education is the key to gender equality, and the importance of gender equity in education system in order to create a better environment for girls under traditional pressures. It will also query whether a philosophy of education offering the same opportunities to young women and men, teaching the same things at the same time, in the same place, with the same methods, and under the same system is necessary or not.

## Keywords

Gender; Equity; Inequity; Education; Tradition

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## 1. Introduction

What is education? Is it to cultivate land or plant? Is it about recreating nature or rebuilding it? Is it to light environment or water young shoots? Is it to fill in the empty minds or light them? Is it to change usual behaviors of human beings or shape them? Is it to provide perfect brains for countries or living machines for factories? Is it about bringing up children without discriminating both sexes, male and female, or teaching them fruit of knowledge tree, or training boys and girls as equal individuals of societies? Can we say that all these things refer to education, or education covers all of them? If so, education must be a great umbrella. This umbrella should be embraced by two sexes equally as well.

In general meaning, we accept that education deals with formation of habits of human beings. If so, we need

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education seriously to focus on promoting the equal participation of women and men in making decisions; reducing enrollment gap between women's and men's access; giving equality in learning process, educational outcomes and external results; and providing equal benefits for both sexes.

Here we will discuss main issues such as significance of gender equity in education, a philosophy of education based on gender, patriarchal and traditional effects on females, and educational approaches for two sexes.

## 2. Gender Equity in Education

Gender equity or equality in education means that males and females have equal opportunities in terms of economic, social, cultural, and political developments. If gender equity is exactly achieved this will contribute to future of girls and boys more than approaches men-centered, and girls will get benefits from public and domestic life as much as boys.

On the other hand, when gender equity in formal or informal education is attached importance; the vital issues such as gaps, divisions and conflicts between sexes in society are reduced. Despite of several governmental or non-governmental organizations or companies, inequalities about access to schools between genders still go on. Strict traditional rules of society and patriarchal families in rural areas and east part of our county as in many countries of world keep girls at home. Opportunities offered to men and women are far from equality, many women are illiterate as results of poverty, discrimination, incomplete schooling, and inadequate education or denied education. While girls are kept at home as idle creatures, housekeepers, victims of patriarchy, or servants helping their mothers; boys enjoy fully of privileges offered by traditional norms of society. *"The boys are looked up as the future bread-winners, and consequently every effort is made to fit them for an honorable career in life"* [1].

These typical images of men and women as inheritance of centuries still are among the most important problems of our age. According to the traditional views claimed *"the ideal of education that demands the same culture for the sexes is wrong, the girl must be trained for wifehood and motherhood first of all"* [2]. That is to say, women are depicted as mothers and housewives, nevertheless men are not only fathers and bread-winner but also owner and protector of women.

These kinds of approaches causing inequity between sexes produce negative results for families and societies as well as women. Gender inequality humiliates women both at home and outside. Mostly men make important decisions in domestic life and public one, women obey whatever men say, and male sex has great power over female sex, this inequality poisons from generation to generation for ages. As follows; women with less education cannot arrange their marriage themselves in some areas, especially eastern parts. Even though marriage bride money is paid, small girls, schoolgirls under 18 are married by fathers without getting their ideas. They have a religious marriage of traditional values, they have no reproduction rights. What a pity gender inequalities is common in families having lower education. Besides this some families send girls to only primary schools, they do not allow their higher or academic education, thus women suffer from unequal conditions under men-made laws.

Women living in men's world, that is, in a world in which education is characterized by extensive gender inequities, have obtained some social, political and economic opportunities thanks to women movements and feminism since 19<sup>th</sup> century, but most of women are not aware of human rights obtained nor completely know their places in the society. Whereas education of women will raise both family and society by creating brilliant children, educating girls will produce lots of additional socio-economic gains to societies and families, and thus feminine sex will walk side by side with masculine sex. Over the years, policy of education has focused on access and parity; but the enrollment gap between girls and boys are not being closed. If an achieved equity of girls and boys in education increases productivity in economy, provides higher incomes, delays marriages for teenagers, reduces unconscious fertility rates, brings up fewer: but healthier individuals.

According to the Constitution of Turkish Republic (Item 42) for men and women, although the elementary education is compulsory and free in our country in public schools, access of girls to school is not sufficient. Additionally primary and secondary schools, all institutions and faculties in universities are open for both sexes and mostly include equal opportunities for males and females except some trade or commercial schools designed for only men or women. But the gap between sexes cannot be closed.

Compulsory elementary education was expanded from 5 to 8 years with law No. 4306 dated 18.08.1997; however girls still have less access to education than boys as seen in **Table 1**.

**Table 1.** National education statistics.

| Year    | Access of Girls and Boys to Education |                     |
|---------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
|         | Primary Education                     | Secondary Education |
|         | Total: Boys/Girls                     | Total: Boys/Girls   |
| 1997/98 | 84,74: 90,25/78,97                    | 37,87: 41,39/34,16  |
| 2009/10 | 98,17: 98,47/97,84                    | 64,95: 67,55/62,21  |

(National Education Statistics, Formal Education Reports 1997-2010).

As seen above according to 1997/1998 national education statistics (NES), while The enrollment ratio at the elementary level is 90.25% for boys and 78.97% for girls, twelve years later in 2009/2010 this ratio is 98.47% for boys and 97.84% for girls, on the other hand, in higher education in 1997/1998 schooling for males is 11.28% and for girls is 9.17%. In 2009/2010 school year, this ratio in higher education is 29.40% for males and 25.92% for girls.

According to Turkish National Education Statistics for 2012-2013, in Turkey there are totally 29,169 primary schools and 28,177 of these schools are state schools, the rests are private ones. In these schools, 2,862,730 of 5,593,910 students are boys, 2,731,180 students are girls. As for in secondary schools in 16,987 educational institutions, 2,815,534 of total 5,566,986 students are boys, and 2,751,452 students are girls. In the educational period of 2011 when we look at ratios of genders in the schools we see that schooling for boys in primary schools is 98.77%; and for girls is 98.56%. And in secondary schools boys are 68.53%; and girls are 66.14%. As for higher schools the ratio is 35.59% for boys and 35.42% for girls.

As these reports show, there is still an evident gap between women and men's access to education; there are still large gender disparities. Even though "*putting gender equity in place in the classroom is a key to connecting schooling and citizenship with human rights*" [3], present education system cannot completely remove gender inequality. "*The laws of mind are identical for the two sexes the education of women should be the same as that of men*" [4]. Otherwise social, political, cultural and economic progresses cannot be in levels expected and the gap between sexes will enlarge gradually.

If so gender equity in education needs radical and brave reforms for "*Better marriage, higher standards of fatherhood and motherhood, wider scope for the development of individuality, more intelligent appreciation of the role of the family in the state, greater privacy, truer protection, more generous affection which will bind the family more strongly as a unit*" [4].

Belief that "*a woman's education must be planned in relation to man*" [5] must leave its place for needs of women. Additionally "*the necessity of educating the sexes together to perfect both*" [6] should be accepted by everyone.

### 3. What Sort of a Philosophy of Education

How an approach of education or what kind of a philosophy of education should be planned? How should gender education become? Should the education projects focus on only boys 'needs? Or should education equally meet the needs of all learners, girls and boys? Exactly, girls should have the freedom to learn, explore, and develop skills in all academic lives. Mostly young girls of poor and uneducated families living in rural or remote areas still are lack of access to quality learning opportunities.

Illiterate parents are not aware of gender equality to provide in the learning process many opportunities to female sexes nor men obeying traditional rules tightly consciously put women in 'ivory tower' and are unwilling about having equal rights and similar qualifications in economic, social, cultural, educational and political activities. Therefore uneducated families and their children should be taken a closer look by local managements; a policy of education based on gender equity to raise the awareness of society from seven to seventy-seven is one of the most important needs of the age.

Because the essence of education is knowledge; both males and females should reach it easily; they should freely benefit from knowledge-tree. Surely, that is not all. "*Education implies teaching. Teaching implies knowledge. Knowledge is truth. The truth is everywhere the same. Hence education should be everywhere the same*" [7]. Of course education for everyone should be the same under any political, social or economic conditions.

What can be done for gender equity in education? “*No reform is more important or more urgent than to transform education, to endeavor to relate it to the life, needs and aspirations of the people and thereby make it a powerful instrument of social, economic and cultural transformation necessary for the realization of our national goals*” [8]. This can be done if development plans to close the existing gap between education of sexes are put into practice as short a time as possible.

We have to think about and practice main matters of crucial importance for development and welfare of elementary, secondary and higher education; deal with certain observations including the following:

1) Traditional and feudal gender roles causing gender inequality should be removed by present education policy.

2) The equal rights and learning processes of the sexes to education, on the other words, co-education of boys and girls; enrollment policies and educational practice of schools by the same teaching methods, in the same curriculum, and in content should be regarded as a vital issue; educational facilities on equalization of educational opportunities have to be expanded for males and females.

3) Female sex restricted by patriarchal society in religious, social, political or economic contexts in all ages should be gone up level of male sex; equality between sexes should be achieved

4) Girls should be encouraged for education by encouragement programs, companies and scholarships frequently to be organized for girls limited traditional family structure must be broken down. “*They should be sent to school to mix with a number of equals, for only by the jostlings of equality can we form a just opinion of ourselves*” [9]. When the education of girls is regarded as a social problem, more satisfied developments in quality and quantity of education will appear for individual and society.

5) Ministry of Education should put gender equity in its programs; girls “access to education” should be provided by formal and informal or voluntary and welfare organizations, associations engaged in programs of female education by means of congress, symposiums and seminars, radio and TV talks, audio-visual documents.

6) Families not enrolling their daughters should be educated by formal educational projects. Lectures, symposiums or seminars by teachers or educators about progress of their children in the schools, educating offices or public halls should be given; national consciousness has to be promoted for a better future by quality reforms.

7) Course books should be suitable for both sexes, purified from sexual discriminations. A course called “gender” should take part in curriculum of schools. They must meet needs of boys and girls students.

## 4. Conclusions

As “*education, in its broadest sense, is the means of this social continuity of life*” [10] (Dewey, 1954, p. 6) can not only address to men but also have to take women into consideration, to reach quality, progress, or achievement, education needs gender equity.

Then compelling benefits associated with girls’ education are numerous, which include crucial matters such as reducing women’s fertility rates, lowering infant, child or maternal mortality rates, improving mother and child health, protecting females from HIV/AIDS viruses, domestic violence and pressures, exploitations and abuses, decreasing troubles about women’s equal work and equal pay labor force, and regarding women’s role in domestic and public life, their contribution in the economic productivity and growth, and their social and political struggles.

Thanks to the fight for women’s rights, increasing participation of women in the job market and to the right to vote, women have emerged from the strictly private sphere to which they were formerly restricted. Women have broken the implicit social contract that, for more than hundreds of years, has confined them to home, child rearing, household tasks and fieldwork, while men worked outside the home.

But because of insufficient interests, gender equity in education runs to failure for millions of girls and women under the heavy weight of circumstances throughout the world and needs supporters to take more active roles as early as possible in breaking down the traditional resistance against the education of girls.

Shortly, nowadays, that “*women cannot be confined to merely domestic pursuits*” [9] is a fact known to everyone, but if subordination of female sex still goes on in this way, both individual and social benefits will forever wait for another spring.

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