

GENDER INEQUALITY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION: EVIDENCE FROM 14 SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

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BACKGROUND

Gender inequality in schooling has been well established in the African education literature. This paper aims to explore gender gaps in reading and math achievement using data on 6th graders from 14 sub-Saharan African countries. This area of study is relevant to policy-makers because despite the substantial research on gender inequality in educational attainment in sub-Saharan African, not nearly as much literature exists on gender differences in other facets of education such as achievement. Not enough is known on gender differences in learning and literacy in Africa and the factors that influence these differences as the existing research on the female disadvantage in schooling has focused mainly on school enrolment and educational attainment partly due to the limited data on achievement available. The purpose of this analysis is first to provide a cross-national analysis of gender differences in three measures - education investments, grade progression and academic achievement and then to study the factors that are correlated with the size of the gender gap.

The objectives of this paper are to answer the following research questions: (1) How much gender inequality is there in education investments, quantity and quality? (2) What cross-national differences in these indicators, by gender, are there in the countries represented in SACMEQ II countries? The study of these differences will allow an answer to the question (3) which countries have been able to eliminate gender differences in achievement? And finally (4) what factors are associated with smaller gender disparities?

DATA AND METHODS

The data comes from a sample of 6th grade pupils in the second evaluation of the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ II) conducted in 2000-2002. SACMEQ consists of 15 Ministries of Education from countries in Southern and Eastern Africa: Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zanzibar and Zimbabwe (not included in SACMEQ II evaluations). The SACMEQ II evaluation collected data on approximately 40,000 pupils, 5,300 teachers, and 2,300 primary schools in 14 countries.

To study the cross-national differences in gender inequality in education, regressions are used to model the size of the gender gaps in achievement, by country, then the same models are run on the full sample with dummy variables to represent country to estimate the overall gender difference for the countries being studied. The second phase of the analysis which studies the country-level factors that are associated with smaller gender disparities in schooling uses two-level multilevel analysis.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Results show that very few SACMEQ countries have successfully eliminated gender disparities. The female disadvantages are decreased by family socio-economic background and school quality.