

Guiding Literacy Practice: Context Matters

Girls' Empowerment through Language and Literacy (GELL)

A Landscape Review of Gender and Literacy Research in African Contexts

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ACRONYMS

ABC	Abstinence, Be faithful, Condomize
ADEA	Association for the Development of Education in Africa
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CA	Classroom Assistant
CAMFED	Campaign for Female Education
CFS	Child-Friendly School
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CONFEMEN	<i>Conférence des Ministres de l'Éducation des États et Gouvernements de la Francophonie</i> (Conference of the Ministers of Education of French speaking countries)
CVMSC	Center for Visual Methodologies for Social Change
DFID	Department for International Development
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
EFA	Education for All
EFA-FTI	Education for All – Fast Track Initiative
EGRA	Early Grade Reading Assessment
ESAR	Eastern and Southern African Region
ESP	Education Sector Plan
FAWE	Forum for African Women Educationalists
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GAC	Global Affairs Canada



GBV	Gender-based violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEC	Girls' Education Challenge
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
GPE	Global Partnership for Education
GRN	Global Reading Network
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IRC	International Rescue Committee
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer
LPP	Learning Post Program
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MHM	Menstrual Hygiene Management
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NLG	New London Group
NSGE	National Strategy for Girls' Education
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OOSC	Out-of-school children
PASEC	<i>Programme d'Analyse des Systèmes Educatifs de la CONFEMEN</i> (Program for the Analysis of Education Systems of the CONFEMEN)



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PIRLS	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PVM	Participatory Visual Methodologies
RIRRS	<i>Réseau International de Recherche sur les Représentations Sexuées dans les Manuels Scolaires</i> (International Network for Research into Gendered Representations in Textbooks)
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SRGBV	School Related Gender Based Violence
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank



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WGBLM Working Group on Books and Learning Materials



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context: Framed within the context of the global Girls' Education movement, this review marks the shift from the 2000 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) focus on access to education to the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) questions about educational quality. To date, gender and literacy research about African contexts tends to focus on statistical surveys that map out reading achievement scores. Findings highlight intersections between wealth, gender, and location, with the largest literacy disparities between girls from marginalized and low-income households in rural areas and boys from privileged and high-income households in urban areas. However, when it comes to more specific pedagogical questions regarding gender and what works to support and strengthen the literacy practices of girls and boys in different contexts, there is a paucity of research. This gap offers important opportunities for establishing a meaningful gender and literacy research agenda.

Objectives: This review has two broad objectives: 1) to present an overview of literature in the area of gender and literacy, with a specific focus on African contexts; and 2) to identify possible directions for research to inform CODE activities, with particular emphasis on the feminist approach and action areas identified in *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy* as well as the areas outlined in SDG 4 (Quality Education) and 5 (Gender Equality). Prioritizing peer-reviewed scholarship, this review located sources through a range of search strategies (academic databases, NGO websites, bibliographies, and personal networks).

Theoretical framework: Two theoretical developments inform the review. First, thinking about what is known as new literacies expands understandings of literacy beyond discrete skillsets for decoding texts and considers literacy as a social practice that also includes the role, meanings, and social relations related to literacies in everyday life. Second, feminist approaches to empowerment recognize the systemic nature of gender oppression, with inequalities deeply embedded within social structures and norms that intersect with other forms of difference such as class, ethnicity, ability, and age. Carefully nuanced approaches need to respond to context and involve communities in participatory ways.

Major Areas of Study in Gender and Literacy: Key Findings

1. Policy environment: An array of policy instruments promotes gender equality and shapes the structural aspects of girls' education from international conventions to national education policies. Many countries have developed sophisticated gender machinery for mainstreaming gender in education policies, programs, and projects, including women's and gender ministries, national girls' education strategies, and gender focal point positions. However, limited research reports on the impact, cumulative effect, and interactions of these policies and structures in relation to literacy in girls' and boys' lives.

2. Teaching, learning, and literacy practices: Very limited *gender* research explores literacy as a social practice, and what happens in relation to literacy and language learning both inside and outside classrooms. Bilingual models that include early mother tongue education are positioned positively, particularly for girls from rural areas and disadvantaged communities. Also, the role of teachers cannot be minimized; in rural areas, it may be the teacher who is the main literate



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person. Teachers are therefore key agents of change in classrooms and need to play a central role in the design and implementation of gender- and context-responsive pedagogies. Yet not enough is known about the gendered differences of the reading and writing practices of either young people or teachers, or the relationships between the literacy practices of students and teachers. Young people and teachers must be positioned as both consumers and producers of various textual forms, in particular, in the contemporary digital age.

3. Gender and learning materials: While gender bias in textbooks was identified as an issue several decades ago, research indicates the existence of ongoing gender bias in learning materials. Most research reports on gender bias, specifically in textbooks, in both quantitative and qualitative aspects of representation. Smaller bodies of scholarship conduct a gender analysis of other learning materials, such as children’s storybooks and young adult literature. Very limited research addresses how young people engage with gender issues in and through various types of texts. Lastly, the review indicates that women are poorly represented in the publishing industry and little is known about how gender is taken up in materials development.

4. Emerging literacies for social change: To support gender equality and girls’ empowerment, research emphasizes *comprehensive* sexuality education, beginning in primary school, as a critical approach for addressing and transforming social norms related to gender, sexuality, and sexual and reproductive health. More research is needed in the areas of how health and sexual literacies relate to reading and writing practices, and empowerment. As key agents of change in classrooms, teachers play a central role in the design and implementation of critical pedagogies that address rather than reinforce dominant gender norms. Participatory and learner-centered pedagogies show promise in this area.

5. Gender-responsive schools: School environments play an important role in shaping girls’ and boys’ learning experiences. Key findings indicate that gendered inequalities are often ingrained in the structure and culture of schooling; the gendered aspects of the school environment include many different areas, including school policies, toilets and menstrual health management, women teachers, mentors, and leaders, in-school support systems for girls, extra-curricular activities such as clubs and children’s play, inclusive education frameworks, and attention to boys’ education and achievements. Transforming the school environment means integrating inclusive forms of school governance and addressing how inequalities are often normalized through everyday practices and routines. Much research to date focuses particularly on combating gender-based and sexual violence in schools, and calls for gender-responsive, child-friendly, and whole-school approaches to schooling. Limited research explores the implications of the school environment for literacy and language learning.

Promising Areas for Further Research in the Area of Gender and Literacy

1. Gender, literacy, and the policy environment: Research needs to be done on the relationship between policy and practice, and the difference the policy environment makes in relation to girls’ empowerment, school experiences, and literacies. This area includes questions about policy impact, policy implementation, and from-the-ground-up approaches that create opportunities for girls and boys, women and men, to speak back to policy.



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2. The literacy practices of girls and boys in school and beyond: There is a need for more nuanced and contextualized understandings of literacy practices and how young people engage with and produce various forms of text. This research area might explore the different reading and writing practices of girls and boys, genre preferences and how they develop, and how gender identities are expressed and produced through different forms of literacy. Given how very little research into new literacies has explored literacy practices in African contexts, this research area might also explore the gendered nature of literacies in multilingual contexts, and how changing digital technologies shape literacy practices.

3. Gender and reading materials: Research needs to address how the specific reading and viewing content of different texts and genres might focus on themes and issues related to gender and social change. This research needs to explore the responses of different readers to various textual genres, and how to ensure the appropriateness of texts in gender-responsive teaching. This area should include work on understudied questions about the gendered nature of materials development, and how different actors negotiate the issue of gender in publishing processes.

4. Gender, literacy, and teacher education: Few studies have focused on what is happening in teacher education in relation to girls' and women's empowerment. There is a need to study what is known about gender and the literacy practices of pre-service and in-service teachers, with specific attention being paid to the needs and experiences of women teachers. This research area might identify and develop programs that support pre-service or in-service teachers as readers and writers. This includes exploring how pre-service and in-service teachers become agents of change in promoting literacies in school, and why and when teachers adopt pedagogical change.

5. Sexual health literacies: Although this area goes beyond what is traditionally seen as literacy, if girls' empowerment is to be central to literacy agendas, it is critical to consider their health and wellbeing. Limited research explores questions about gender, literacy, and empowerment in relation to sexual health. What does literacy have to do with sexual health education? This area might explore the literacies of young people and teachers in relation to various sexual health texts, as well as in peer education programs and in participatory curriculum development.

6. Gender, literacy, and the school environment: How can gender-responsive, whole-school, and child-friendly approaches make a difference in relation to supporting girls and boys as actors and knowers through literacy? School environment research might explore distinct areas such as governance and the experiences, capacities, and challenges of schools in developing new approaches, as well as how infrastructure and access to basic services intersect with and shape literacy practices and empowerment. Research might also explore the role of women teachers, mentors, and leaders and how best to support them. Given the understudied relationship between gender, disability, and literacy, what might an inclusive social justice framework for literacy learning look like? School environment research might also examine, from a holistic or systems perspective, how these different types of interventions work together.

7. Literacies and girls' clubs: Given the widespread use of girls' clubs and gender clubs as an intervention to support girls' education and support gender empowerment, research needs to explore how such clubs matter in relation to how literacy affects empowerment. Very little scholarly study explores girls' clubs and gender clubs in Africa. Given the insufficiency of work



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in this area, research might study how different clubs promote different types of literacy practices, the structures of collectives, groups, and networks, the ways in which clubs influence social connectedness or exclusion, and what happens when club participants get older.

8. Literacies, puberty education, and menstrual hygiene management (MHM): Given the fundamental role of MHM in supporting girls' education, sexual and reproductive health, and their empowerment, the relationship between MHM and literacies is critically understudied. Gender and literacy research in the area of puberty education and MHM is linked to concerns about educational quality and outcomes that have sexual and reproductive health goals. Research in this area might address questions about how books on puberty (called Puberty Readers) intersect with policy and curricula, sanitary facilities, and comprehensive approaches to sexual health education. Little is known, for example, about the role of teachers, principals, administrators, and teacher education programs in supporting and improving MHM in schools, and how this could be strengthened. Additional research that includes the perspectives and voices of girls and boys in the design and development of culturally appropriate and relevant education on puberty and MHM is also needed.

INTRODUCTION TO GIRL'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY REVIEW

Framed within the context of Girls' Education, this review asks: What's gender got to do with literacy and language learning? How is literacy being taken up differently for girls and for boys? To date, the global movement for girls' education has concentrated largely on improving girls' access to primary schooling. With the MDG focus on access, much of the scholarship on gender and education in Africa has addressed the numbers of girls attending school and how to keep girls in school. In many ways, questions about parity regarding girls' access to and completion of formal schooling remain critical for girls' empowerment and gender equality, more generally. Yet despite substantial improvements on achieving parity in schooling, there is still a long way to go. Progress in achieving gender parity is uneven, with considerable differences across wealth distribution and geographic location with parity decreasing at secondary and tertiary levels.

With the transition to the SDGs, girls' completion of secondary education is positioned as a key strategy to achieving the entire 2030 Agenda. The 2016 UNFPA State of the World Population report, *10: How our Future Depends on a Girl at This Decisive Age* identifies 10 years of age as a critical turning point in girls' lives. The cohort of girls who were 10 at the start of the SDGs will be 25 years old by 2030. During this transition from girlhood to adulthood, a number of decisions will affect their experiences and social positions related to puberty, schooling, sexual health, marriage, childbirth, and entry into the paid workforce. The success of the SDGs depends on investing in policies, institutions, and strategies that support 10-year-old girls as well as their families and communities through these decisions.

When it comes to what works in relation to these issues concerning girls' education, a number of reports that focus on the Global South inform this review (see Marcus & Page, 2016; Miske, 2013; UNESCO, 2016a; UNFPA, 2016; Unterhalter et al., 2014). These overviews underscore how gender relations are complex, situated, and systemic. Supporting girls' education and empowerment, and transforming gender relations more generally requires a wide range of



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multi-faceted strategies, structural inputs, and interventions that are responsive to context. These include financing, resources, and infrastructure, as well as the mainstreaming of gender in educational institutions as well as in policies and programs.

With the SDG transition to educational quality objectives, there is a need to investigate more deeply what is happening with teaching and learning to address how many young people finish primary school without adequate literacy skills. Here, questions about the gendered nature of the learning environment and pedagogical practices take on more significance. This review, therefore, focuses on teaching and learning as “the actual work of teachers and students that takes place in the classroom” (Miske, 2013, p. 6), with a dual focus on what it means to improve language and literacy learning *and* address gender empowerment. It is of critical significance that while attending school and learning to read and write can be empowering, schooling alone does not necessarily create the conditions for sustained empowerment. Research shows that schooling and pedagogical practices often work to reinforce and sometimes exacerbate dominant gender norms and inequalities. Given concerns about educational quality, it is crucial to be aware of just how little attention is being paid to the gendered nature of language and literacy teaching and learning practices in Africa. Gender and pedagogy are not nearly as widely documented as are the broader structural issues related to girls’ access to education (Miske, 2013).

Reflecting on the effectiveness of literacy programs around the world in addressing women’s empowerment, Nelly Stromquist (1995) remarked over two decades ago:

Literacy skills can also be empowering, but they must be accompanied by a process that is participatory and a content that questions established gender relations, features that, unfortunately, do not characterize the great majority of literacy programs (p. 17).

Decades later, similar concerns persist about the ways in which literacy and language learning can be emancipatory. Literacy scholars emphasize the need for educators to broaden their view on literacy from being simply about reading and writing, and decoding to the much more expansive notion that literacy is about making meaning. Important changes in thinking about literacy include Freire and Macedo’s (1987) *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*, with its focus on the relationship between text and context, as well as the New London Group’s (1996) pedagogy of multiliteracies that emphasizes multilingual and multimodal forms of communication. The idea that literacy and literacies can spur transformation and empowerment is very much part of a social justice framework since literacy teaching and learning are creative and political acts (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

In Africa, the connections between literacy, language, teaching, and learning practices, and the empowerment of girls and boys remain critically understudied. Most well documented in relation to gender and literacy are broader quantitative patterns about the differences in girls’ and boy’s reading achievements, with the widest gaps between girls from poor or disadvantaged households in rural areas and boys from wealthy or privileged households in urban areas. Yet, often literacy research lacks sex-disaggregated analysis resulting in seemingly gender-neutral results. Gender and literacy research in other geographical contexts demonstrates that the relationship between gender, language, and literacy is not straightforward, and a small body of African studies have begun to focus more closely on the specific literacy practices of girls through reading and after-school clubs, for example; these have produced important nuanced and contextualized insights. However, a comparative gender analysis and research about the specific literacy practices of boys is lacking, leading some scholars to interrogate the need for more rigorous study of boys’ education. Very little is known about the gendered nature of *how*



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literacies are being taken up and addressed differently by girls and by boys, as well as by women and men teachers in African schools and communities.

There is a tendency in the literature to either celebrate uncritically how literacy generates empowerment or critique gender norms and patriarchal structures in ways that risk perpetuating stereotypical views. For example, postcolonial concerns about the construction of women in developing countries as a singular, homogenous category, characterized as victims (Mohanty, 1988) are ever-present in contemporary discussions about girls' education; this risks essentializing a particular type of African girlhood (MacEntee, 2016a). It is important to emphasize how girls, as a category, are far from being a monolithic bloc, shaped as they are by different social factors. Research needs to interrogate how girls' and boys' *specific* social locations influence literacy practices. This report emphasizes the importance of an intersectional perspective that differentiates how some girls and boys face multiple and intersecting forms of marginalization that include gender, but that also include race, class, ethnicity, religion, geographic location, age, and ability. An intersectional focus can help develop more nuanced analyses of how factors such as girls' and boys' ethnic or religious minority status, girls' and boys' experiences as refugees or internally displaced persons, or other physical and mental health factors contribute to the relationship between gender and literacy. The complexities of what counts as girlhood and boyhood need to be interrogated to help devise more effective gender-transformative approaches to language and literacy learning. The emphasis of this review on gender, language, and literacy in Africa identifies these gaps and offers recommendations for future research.

The review has two key objectives: 1) to present an overview of literature in the area of gender, language and literacy, with a specific focus on African contexts and in response to the key areas outlined in the Terms of Reference (see Appendix A), and 2) to identify possible directions for research and intervention to inform CODE activities, with particular emphasis on the feminist approach and action areas identified in *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy* (GAC, 2017) and the areas outlined in the Sustainable Development Goals #4 (Quality Education) and #5 (Gender Equality) (see Appendix B).

Drawing on key findings from broader reviews of girls' education and learning, this review is organized into the following major areas:

I) Policy environment: The first section presents the more structural aspects that influence girls' education such as international conventions, national development policies, education sector plans, and gender mainstreaming machinery. This section also includes research about policy practice implementation. The focus of this section is primarily on education systems, as opposed to individual schools, learners, teachers, or communities.

II) Teaching, learning, and literacy practices: The second section focuses specifically on pedagogy. It explores gender differences in girls' and boys' reading and writing practices both inside and outside classrooms. This section centers on the role of teachers in both supporting girls' education and addressing gender equality, and suggests the need for a stronger gender component in both pre-service and in-service teacher training.



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III) Gender and learning materials: The third section addresses the quality of learning materials that address gender. Most of the literature reviewed reports on gender bias specifically in textbooks. There are also smaller bodies of scholarship that explore other learning materials such as children’s books and young adult literature. This section calls for a stronger gender focus in materials development and the publishing industry.

IV) Emerging literacies for social change: The fourth section further expands on the idea of literacy to include sexual health literacies. It explores the relationship between comprehensive sexuality education and gender empowerment, and the implications for curriculum, pedagogy, and teacher education.

V) Gender-responsive schools: The final section addresses a wide range of factors in the school environment that affect girls’ and boys’ experiences at school. These include the gendered dimensions of formal school structures such as school policies, governance, and infrastructure. This section also elaborates on how gendered inequalities are often normalized in the everyday cultures, practices, and routines of schools. Critical here is the need to address gender and sexual violence in schools. This section emphasizes the need for a whole-school approach to transforming the school environment.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMING

This section defines the key vocabulary and outlines working definitions that inform the review. Given the goal of this review to identify directions for future gender and literacy research, this section not only defines key terms but also contextualizes how their emergence relates to changing thinking in the areas of gender and literacy.

New Literacies

New Literacy Studies move away from dominant autonomous views of literacy as a set of neutral or universal skills towards views of literacy as a situated social practice (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 2003). Therefore, literacies are not considered as discrete reading and writing skills that can be given or acquired, but practices embedded within social relations of power and therefore always dynamic and contested. New literacies understand literacies to be situated, located in particular times and places and varying from one context to another. New literacies (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Street, 2003) distinguish between:

Literacy events: Occasions when participants’ interactions and interpretative processes involve a piece of writing or graphic representation (picture, drawing, or other visual text). Literacy events conceptualize the particular role of literacy in relation to more specific moments.

Literacy practices: Forms of social practice that include literacy events and how participants give meaning to them, or “the broader cultural conception of particular ways of thinking about and doing reading and writing in cultural contexts” (Street, 2003, p. 79). Literacy practices move away from viewing literacy as attributes of individuals, to conceptualizing literacies in relation to broader social contexts and practices.



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Thus departing from mechanistic and individualist views of literacy, Barton and Hamilton (2000) offer a social theory of literacy that rests on the following propositions:

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. (p. 8)

In practice, this framing of literacy as social practice demands continued attention and analysis about what counts as literacy for different people in different contexts and across different life stages (Street, 2003). New literacies engender more culturally sensitive approaches to understanding the role of literacies in people's lives. This shift calls attention to how expanded understandings of literacy create new challenges for policy, teaching, and learning.

Multiliteracies and multimodality

In 1996, the New London Group (NLG) of scholars from the UK, US, and Australia, proposed in the title of an article, a "Pedagogy of Multiliteracies" as a model for literacy education that better responds to changing social environments, and, in particular, in the context of an increasingly globalized world. Concerned about the limitations of traditional approaches to literacy education to enable full and equitable social participation, the NLG asked: "How do we ensure the differences of culture, language and gender are not barriers to educational success? And what are the implications of these differences for literacy pedagogy?" (p. 61). Over two decades later, these questions retain poignant relevance for questions about gender and literacy.

A pedagogy of multiliteracies challenges conventional understandings of literacy pedagogy as "teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language" (NLG, 1996, pp. 60-61). This conventional understanding is often restrictive and formalized with a focus on grammar rules as well as monolingual and monocultural ideologies often far-removed from the everyday realities of most people. Instead, multiliteracies "creates a different kind of pedagogy, one in which language and other modes of meaning are dynamic representational resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purposes" (NLG, 1996, p. 64).

Multiliteracies: This is the concept of literacy that values and incorporates an understanding of *multiplicity* in two important ways: 1) increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse societies, and 2) how a variety of types of texts, media and channels intersect in everyday communications environments (multimodality).

Multimodality: This refers to a combination of different semiotic modes, including audio, print, image, animation, performance, and interactivity. South African scholars Stein and Newfield (2006) explained,



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Teaching and learning are multimodal: they happen mainly through modes of speech, writing, action, gesture, image and space, all of which work in different ways with different effects, to create multi-layered communicational ensembles. These ensembles are never neutral: they are meaning-bearing signs which are produced in particular contexts of power, culture and history. (p. 2)

Intertextuality: This refers to the relationship between different types of texts.

Ultimately, the interrelated concepts of multiliteracies and multimodality recognize increasing complexities and interrelationships between different modes of communication and representation, and how people make meaning across and through multiple texts and languages (NLG, 1996). A multiliteracies framework encompasses a number of additional types of literacies (e.g. sexual literacies, health literacies, financial literacies, movement literacy). While these different types of literacies intersect, this review focuses specifically on literacies practices as they relate specifically to gender and reading and writing. The review addresses the concepts of critical literacies and digital literacies in later sections of the report, specifically in relation to teaching and learning approaches.

Importantly, as UK scholar Gemma Moss (2007) noted, while new literacy studies effectively work to distinguish literacy practices across different cultural communities and contexts, with attention to ethnicity and class, the field has paid less attention to difference *within* communities. Gender is, Moss noted, “rarely center stage” (p. 5). This suggests opportunities to bring new literacies together in active dialogue with feminist perspectives about gender.

Gender, Empowerment and its Critique in the Context of Literacies and Development

Unless otherwise noted, the following definitions combine terminology sourced from the following documents: The UN Women Training Center’s (2016) website glossary; FAWE’s (2005) *Gender-Responsive Pedagogy: A Teacher’s Handbook*, prepared by Mlana et al., and the Chantam University Women’s Institute’s handout, *Understanding Sex, Gender and Sexuality*, prepared by Jessie Ramey.

The relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality

The second wave feminist movement distinguished between sex and gender to demonstrate the social construction of gender difference, and challenge biological deterministic views that have positioned women as being *naturally* inferior to men. Most development literature about girls’ education and gender empowerment works with this understanding, summarized below:

Sex: Sex refers to physical and biological characteristics and anatomy, including hormones, chromosomes, internal and external genitalia, including sexual reproductive systems. The terms *male* and *female* refer to biological sex.

Gender: Gender is a broad term that refers to the roles, behaviors, and attributes that any given society associates with femininity and masculinity. Gender is considered a socially constructed relation, with characteristics that are learned through socialization and that



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change over time. As such, gender is considered an ongoing accomplishment (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). The terms *male* and *female* refer to biological sex, and the terms *girl*, *boy*, *woman* and *man* refer to dominant gender identities.

Gender norms: Gender norms are the social standards and expectations about how men and women should be and act. These rules are learned and often internalized early in life. These ideas are often so normalized that many people either are not consciously aware of them, or consider them to be natural. Gender norms form the basis of stereotypes about gender identity in a particular society, culture, and community at any given point in time.

Discrimination against women: “Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field” (UN, 1979, Article 1).

Gender stereotypes: These are simplistic generalizations about the gender attributes, differences, and roles of women and men. Stereotypical ideas about men and women often reinforce the idea that women are inferior or less capable than men, and are often used to justify gender discrimination. Stereotypes about men and women can be perpetuated through a variety of forms, including songs, advertising, stories, traditional proverbs, radio and television, as well as in theories, laws, and institutional practices.

A number of additional terms related to sex and gender emerge from third wave feminist thinking that complicates the notion of gender and the relationships between gender, sex, and sexuality. While not as prominent in the development literature, the terms below offer further concepts and language for gender empowerment work and research. They are particularly relevant given the need to address sexuality, sexual violence, and sexual health education in an inclusive way, with attention to individuals and groups marginalized from dominant norms.

Intersectionality: Gender intersects with other forms of social difference, such as race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and language. Intersectionality identifies how individuals can experience multiple forms of discrimination *at the same time*. The idea that structures of power intersect emerged from theorizing about the particular experiences of Black women in the US of *both racial and gender discrimination* (Crenshaw, 1989). Intersectionality also explains why individuals can experience both discrimination and privilege at the same time.

Gender orientation: This includes the deep internal sense of gender identity, which may or may not align with the gender assigned at birth, based on sex.

Gender binary: This refers to the idea that every person is or should identify with either masculine or feminine gender identities, that these two genders are distinct, and that these two genders are the only options.



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Sexual orientation: This refers to a person’s capacity for attraction to, and intimate and sexual relations with other people. Dominant sexual orientations work within a sex/gender binary to include relations with individuals of a different sex (heterosexuality), the same sex (homosexuality), or both sexes (bisexuality).

NB: It is important to note that many people who identify as LGBTQ (see below) avoid the term *homosexual* because of its historical use in the field of psychology as mental disorder, and its ongoing status as a derogatory term. In 34 African countries, homosexuality is criminalized and subject to grave punishment, including, in some countries, life imprisonment or death. The term *lesbian* is also sometimes avoided.

Heteronormativity: Normalized ideas about sex and gender assume a heterosexual orientation between two people who fit into a male-female gender binary. Heteronormativity underlies dominant social expectations about femininity and masculinity that centrally inform the conceptualization of institutions such as families, schools, and the nation state.

LGBTQ: An acronym that refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer identities.

Trans: An umbrella term, sometimes written as trans*, that includes numerous non-binary and gender non-conforming identities, genders, and sexual orientations.

Gender and Development

The global gender and education movement tends to work within a development framework, operationalizing the major concepts put forward in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action developed at the 1995 World Conference on Women. These concepts emerged out of earlier efforts to integrate women into development, and identified problems with the underlying efficiency-based argument that women’s participation was better for *development* (but not necessarily for women), and the predominantly economic nature of development that women were being integrated into. Work in on gender and development endeavors to be more transformative of power structures and relations and focuses on two key areas:

Women’s empowerment: “Empowerment is a process to change the distribution of power, both in interpersonal relations and in institutions throughout society” (Stromquist, 1995, p. 15). “Women’s empowerment is the process by which women collectively come to recognize and address the gender issues that stand in the way of their advancement. In a patriarchal society, these gender issues are the practices of gender discrimination which are entrenched in custom, law, and ideological belief” (Longwe, 1998, p. 19).

Addressing how the subordination of women has many dimensions, Stromquist (1995) distinguished between different types of empowerment that must be combined:

Cognitive empowerment refers to women’s access to knowledge to identify the conditions of subordination and understand patterns of behavior, including in the areas of



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sexual and reproductive health, as well as in relation to women's legal rights, in order to re-imagine and act on alternative possibilities for gender relations.

Psychological empowerment refers to the development of feelings about the capability to act and the belief that by taking action, women's current circumstances can change. The psychological aspect of empowerment includes building women's skills, confidence, and self-esteem.

Economic empowerment refers to women's need for economic resources, both generating and controlling resources for change. This means supporting women to gain greater financial independence and leverage through, for example, increased opportunities for income-generation.

Political empowerment refers to women's participation in and mobilization of collective action aimed at transforming the broader social and political environment.

The second main focus of Gender and Development is gender mainstreaming.

Gender mainstreaming: "Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." (UN Economic and Social Council, 1997, p. 3)

Within a gender mainstreaming framework, GPE and UNGEI (2017) distinguish between being gender-sensitive and gender-responsive.

Gender-sensitive: This indicates gender awareness and means that a policy or program recognizes the important effects of gender norms, roles, and relations. It is often contrasted with being gender-blind, which ignores differences in opportunities and resource allocation for women and men.

Gender-responsive: This refers to a policy or program that fulfills two basic criteria: 1) gender norms, roles and relations are considered, and 2) measures are taken to actively reduce the harmful effects of gender norms, roles and relations, including gender inequality.

Therefore, gender-responsive literacy practices would be more effective for not only recognizing gender inequality, but actively working towards transforming gender relations and achieving gender empowerment. It should be noted that transforming gender relations is not neutral work. Norms about gender, sexuality, and childrearing are deeply entrenched in social structures and in individuals' sense of who they are. Challenging these norms can be transformative and empowering, opening up new possibilities, options, and ways of being in the world. However,



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challenging these norms can also be unsettling and threatening and often spur resistance, hostility, and continued cycles of violence.

Gender Violence

School violence: This includes all forms of violence that take place in and around schools, including corporal punishment, gender-based violence, sexual harassment (pupil to pupil, pupil to teacher, teacher to teacher, teacher to pupil), bullying, vandalism, abusive language, and fights (see Parkes & Heslop, 2013; Saito, 2011).

School related gender-based violence (SRGBV): is “a) an expression of stereotypes based on gender and gender inequalities in all of our societies – which perpetuate stereotypes and inequalities; b) includes all types of violence or threat of violence directed specifically against pupils because of their gender and/or affecting girls and boys disproportionately, as the case may be; c) may be of a physical, sexual or psychological nature and may take the form of intimidation, punishment, ostracism, corporal punishment, bullying, humiliation, degrading treatment, harassment and sexual abuse and exploitation; d) may be inflicted by pupils, teachers or members of the educational community; e) may occur: within the school grounds; in its outbuildings; on the way to school; or even beyond, during extracurricular activities or through the increasingly widespread use of ICTs (cyber-bullying, sexual harassment via mobile phones and so forth); f) may have serious long-term consequences, such as: loss of self-confidence, self-deprecation, deterioration of physical and mental health, early and unintended pregnancies, depression, poor academic results, absenteeism, dropout, development of aggressive behaviour and so forth.” (UNESCO, 2015a, addendum, p. 2)

Sexual violence: This includes physical and psychological forms of violence that use sexual acts or attempted sexual acts, regardless of the relationship between the perpetrator and survivor, including sexual assault, rape, intimate partner violence, and all forms of unwanted sexual contact.

Transactional sex: This is a broad term that includes both sex work (sex as paid work) as well as sex for other forms of exchange (gifts or services such as food, clothing, phone credit, alcohol or drugs, higher grades, school tuition, and rides). Transactional sex does not necessarily involve a predetermined payment or gift, but is often motivated by some form of material benefit and is often associated with gender inequalities in relation to poverty.

Given the need for more work to bring together the fields of gender and disability in education, the following terminology is useful (see UNGEI, 2017):

Disability: A social model of disability works to consider disability as an evolving concept resulting from the interaction between person with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This differs from medical models of disability that focus on



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impairments of individuals (see Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006).

Special education: This refers to education models in which people with disabilities are educated separately from non-disabled people, often in special schools or institutions.

Inclusive education: This refers to education models that work to accommodate and serve the diverse needs of all learners, and address exclusion within and from schooling. An inclusive approach covers a wide range of factors and circumstances, such as “hard-to-reach and marginalized children e.g. street children, working children, children from ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, nomadic and displaced children and those living in informal settings. This means that a variety of targeted interventions with attention to each child’s specific context is necessary to ensure that the education system is inclusive, ideally providing choices for parents and children to find the educational environment most suited to each child’s needs” (UNGEI, 2017, p 10).



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METHODOLOGY

Search Strategy

Given the sparse research in the area of gender and literacy in Africa, this review required a number of different broad search strategies. To begin, a search was conducted of peer-reviewed literature in the ERIC (education) database, using:

(girls OR boys OR women OR men OR gender) AND (literacy OR reading OR writing) AND (Africa)

This search yielded 84 results, approximately half of which were considered immediately relevant. Given the limited results of this initial database search, a wider snowball search strategy proved more effective, including:

- close attention to bibliographies, particularly major desk reviews of gender and education that focus on the Global South;
- reviews of websites of gender and education organizations such as UNGEI and FAWE;
- recommendations from the GELL African Advisory Committee and targeted inquiries through other personal networks of scholars;
- tracing the life work of gender and education scholars in various African contexts and the students they have supervised;
- unpublished theses, as recommended by reviewers;
- tracking work across several research hubs (e.g. Centre for Visual Methodologies for Social Change at the University of KwaZulu Natal, the Master of Arts in English Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, and the South African Multimodality in Education research group at the University of Cape Town, South Africa); and
- close attention to listservs of literacy organizations including CODE, Global Partnership for Education (GPE) and the Global Reading Network (GRN).

In total, this review includes almost 200 sources, covering a range of peer-reviewed (journal articles, books, book chapters), theses and dissertations, and grey literature (project reports, policy briefs, toolkits, and manuals).

Scope

The literature included in this review explicitly focuses on gender relations, girls, boys, women, or men. While *all* research is gendered and *could* be analyzed using a gender perspective, this review is limited to scholarship and grey literature reports that intentionally report on gender. Substantial literacy research reports on findings using the language of ‘teachers,’ ‘adults,’ ‘students,’ ‘learners,’ ‘youth,’ and ‘children.’ However, if there is no gender analysis, it was not included in this review, except for the purpose of developing a conceptual framework that reflects contemporary thinking about literacies.

Considering the scope of this review, it is important to be cautious regarding systemic gender bias in research. Given donor interest on evidence-based interventions for girls’ education, many reports and policy briefs work to identify what works in girls’ education. However, as problematized in the DFID-funded rigorous review of girls’ education by Unterhalter et al. (2014), questions about the quality of evidence often point to systemic biases in knowledge production. A lack of or weak evidence does not mean that a problem does not exist, or that a solution or intervention is ineffective. The quality of evidence reflects the extent to which and in what ways research communities, as well as communities of practice, have



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prioritized particular criteria for evaluating research and reported on particular issues. This systemic bias is particularly relevant to gender issues, and how much peer-reviewed research about literacy practices in various African contexts simply does not report on gender. Limited evidence often reflects an *analytical gap*, rather than disproof about a particular intervention, and the need for more research triangulated across diverse epistemological and methodological standpoints.

Cognizant of this systemic bias, this review adopts an inclusive approach to report broadly on *what is happening* in relation to gender and literacy, with strong attention to empirical work. Given the scarcity of gender research about literacy in Africa, no study was excluded from this review on the basis of academic rigor. If the literature was relevant, it was included as an important contribution to developing deeper and more diverse understandings about gender and literacy. Within this approach, the review highlights critical research about creative interventions that indicate possibilities and questions for future research.

The review includes both qualitative and quantitative research. However, most of the scholarship in this review reports on qualitative research. This is consistent with observations by Stromquist (2005) and others about the strength of qualitative and ethnographic research for understanding literacy uses, meanings, and practices, and contextualizing literacy interactions and experiences of literacy learning in the lives of people. Therefore, the review prioritizes criteria for evaluating qualitative research such as trustworthiness, credibility, and persuasiveness, rather than generalizability (see Butler-Kisber, 2010). This means careful attention to factors including the relationship between researchers and participants; the transparency of how methodologies and interpretive processes are reported; the authenticity, reliability, and plausibility of findings; particularizability and convincing attention to context; and researcher reflexivity regarding the research process, subjectivity, and the assumptions and contradictions inherent to the study.

Limitations

Age and level of schooling

Generally, it can be important to distinguish between the specific issues related to primary and secondary schooling. For example, addressing issues related to early grade reading are often more relevant in primary schooling, and those related to puberty and sexuality are often considered more relevant in secondary schooling. However, research demonstrates the importance of addressing gender across all levels of schooling. Indeed, many core issues related to gender and the quality of education—policy, pedagogy, learning materials, sexual health education, and school culture—span both primary and secondary levels of schooling. Given that there is so little gender research about literacy in general, this review considers primary and secondary schooling together and notes the complex and understudied relationship between gender, age, literacy, and grade level.

Language

This review focuses largely on literature written in English. This includes a very wide-reaching body of scholarship, given the global dominance of English in academic publishing, as well as in the UN and International NGOs. However, grounding this review in English also reproduces particular forms of exclusion. A body of Francophone literature specifically reports on French-speaking contexts in Africa and several Francophone networks are doing significant



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work. Literature written in French that was identified through search strategies has been included, where possible. However, a separate search using French search terms has not been conducted. Additionally, this review does not include scholarship published in other colonial languages such as Arabic or Portuguese, or in African languages such as Swahili and Amharic. These bodies of literature would offer critical regional and contextualized insights, but were not included. This exclusion reiterates the importance of working collaboratively across linguistic and cultural contexts.

The politics and geographies of knowledge

The review acknowledges the enormous ethnic and linguistic diversity in the continent of Africa. In focusing on an entire continent, this review risks replicating unwarranted and problematic generalization and simplification. However, given the limited gender and literacy research in various African contexts, amalgamating existing work here also offers an important contribution to this field of study that is expected to grow with the SDG focus on quality education. The review is not intended to be representative of the entire African continent. The intention of the review is to collect, bring together and juxtapose the key areas of gender and literacy research to identify similarities, differences, tensions, gaps, and lessons learned.

The review contains a reasonably comprehensive coverage of studies in West, Central, East, and Southern African contexts; a number of gender and literacy hubs emerged, including Kenya, Uganda, and South Africa. The search strategy mentioned above yielded almost no research about gender and literacy in North African contexts, except a selection of studies and reports about Niger, Sudan, and Mali, all contexts included in sub-Saharan Africa.

In terms of authorship and positionality, the review includes researchers based at African universities, members of the African diaspora based at non-African universities, and non-African scholars who do research in Africa. It is important here to acknowledge how structural challenges shape biases in knowledge production, and the need to work intentionally to support funding and peer-review publishing opportunities, particularly for African researchers based at African universities. Specifically, the limited gender and literacy research might also be indicative of a lack of African women doing literacy research. This trend is addressed more significantly later in relation to women's low representation in higher education institutions, as well as to how gender stereotypes shape how women's roles and priorities are allocated in universities.

Scaling up?

This review does not necessarily address questions about how to scale up interventions to multiply and broaden their reach. While there is strong evidence for the effectiveness of many small scale, community pilots or interventions, and in some cases national policies, this raises questions about scaling up and how interventions need to be adapted to reflect the specificities of local and regional contexts.



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PART A: LITERATURE REVIEW FOCUS AREAS

The key findings of this review are organized into the following five major areas:

- I) The policy environment;
- II) Teaching, learning, and literacy practices;
- III) Gender and learning materials;
- IV) Emerging literacies for social change; and
- V) Gender-responsive schools.

Each of these areas offers a different concentration and scale of analysis. Presented in this order, the review moves from a broad view of the policy environment to a closer look at the social relations and materials that shape literacy practices, and then back out to a holistic consideration of the school environment. The idea is to begin by contextualizing educational systems and how political trends at national and international levels influence schooling. Then, taking up literacy as it relates to reading and writing provides more detailed perspectives about the gendered nature of literacy practices both inside and outside classrooms, and the actual materials that facilitate literacy events. Additionally, the review integrates concern for emerging literacies in relation to sexual and reproductive health. In these areas, the agency of teachers and young people is positioned as central both in terms of making sense of and also transforming literacy practices. Separating pedagogy from materials helps to highlight key areas for research and intervention—teacher education and the publishing industry. The review ends with a focus on the school environment as an institutional site shaped by the broader policy context, but also by school leadership and governing bodies that retain a certain amount of independence to implement and initiate change. Critically, it is important to consider the connections and interactions between these five areas. The review emphasizes the importance of continually examining issues at and across multiple scales. Presented in this way, the review highlights the various people and organizations with vested interests, capabilities, and agency for effecting change in the area of gender and literacy. Each area indicates how issues related to gender and literacy have been and can be taken up within various scholarly fields of educational inquiry.

Given the action-oriented focus of this review, each of the five sections begins with a targeted question, and the key trends and findings in the research.¹ Recommendations and promising approaches are then charted in Part B as a basis for developing a gender and literacy research agenda.

¹ This structure was inspired by the working paper, *Exploring the Gendered Dimensions of Teaching and Learning: Background Paper for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013*, by Miske et al. (2013).



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I) THE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

Question: What is the policy environment in which literacy is taught and learned? How is this gendered? How is the policy environment enacted in practice?

1. A wide array of international conventions and national policies addresses issues related to gender and education. Beyond reading achievement scores, limited research reports on the impact, cumulative

Section Overview

This section focuses on the central role of policies and institutional structures for enabling or constraining gender relations in learning environments. Many recommendations in relation to girls' empowerment focus strongly on the structural conditions that shape education. The presence, absence, and nature of particular policies, as well as the complicated terrain of how policies are developed and what it means to operationalize policy contextualize and influence literacy achievements, what happens in classrooms, and how approaches to education change. Given the structural nature of gender, policies often contain gender biases that are systemic, unintended, or difficult to identify immediately. Many gender policies are therefore designed to alter the institutional conditions and cultures that have an impact on gender and learning, by helping to target and redress and/or by constructing or exacerbating gender-inequitable structural bias.

In the context of gender and literacy, it is important to assess how the policy environment shapes the gendered nature of teaching and learning practices. Therefore, this section identifies and compiles the range of global, regional, and national policies that address gender and education. While a comprehensive analysis of each of the policies and strategies listed here is beyond the scope of this review, a key point is that the policy environment is complex, and, of course, political. The design of effective gender-responsive literacy strategies requires a context-specific analysis of how the policy environment shapes gender relations within the context of literacy learning. There is a need to evaluate how gender and education policies are operationalized in schools and classrooms, and their impact on learning and gender equity.

Historical Policy Trends

To begin, policy trajectories are historic and deeply embedded with broader political, economic, and socio-cultural relations. Several country-specific reviews about gender and



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education dedicate considerable attention to how historical trends have an ongoing role in shaping contemporary policy environments (CAMFED Ghana, 2012; Chege & Sifuna, 2006). Two key policy movements have generated the most scholarly attention, in particular because of the problems related to policies driven by external entities.

First, the formal education systems in many African countries were developed by colonial administrations based on Western ideologies that continue to shape the conditions of schooling. Whereas many precolonial African societies were matrilineal, or maintained complementary gender leadership hierarchies (Chege & Sifuna, 2006; Fallon, 2008), colonial approaches to education and governance tended to privilege men. Colonial education models either streamlined learning objectives for women and girls (based on Christian missionary objectives, or European ideals about femininity), or excluded women and girls from formal education altogether (Chege & Sifuna, 2006; Konde, 2005). It should be noted that Ethiopia was the only country in Africa that was never officially colonized by European powers, but also that colonization was enacted quite differently in different contexts.

Second, the economic growth experienced by many African countries with independence was severely affected by the global recession of the 1980s. Beginning in the early 1990s, many African countries undertook processes of structural reform through Structural Adjustment Programs as part of the conditions for accessing loans from multilateral finance institutions such as the World Bank (WB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). These structural reforms, which can include, for example, decentralization, democratization, and market-based approaches to governance are ongoing and play a significant role in shaping the policy environment, and gender dynamics in any context. Third, the global human rights and gender movements also play a significant role in shaping national laws and policies.

The point is that a complex array of policy and legislative documents intersect with the historical trends in any context. Gender relations and education systems are intertwined within, but are also constitutive of, this policy environment. Importantly, decades of transnational gender advocacy have resulted in significant achievements at transforming the policy environment towards addressing gender discrimination and developing more gender-equitable policies.

International and Regional Policies

A number of regional and international conventions and treaties offer important successes, commitments, and tools for advocacy, including the following:

- 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
- 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 1990 Jomtien Declaration on Education for All (EFA)
- 1994 Dakar Platform for Action – Regional Conference on Women
- 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action
- 1997 Southern African Development Community’s Declaration on Gender and Development
- 1999 African Plan of Action to Accelerate the Implementation of the Dakar and Beijing Platforms for Action for the Advancement of Women
- 2000 Dakar Framework for Action, Education for All (EFA)
- 2000 UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security



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- 2000 Millennium Development Goals
- 2003 Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa
- 2004 Solemn Declaration of Gender Equality in Africa
- 2015 Sustainable Development Goals
- 2015 UN Resolution, "Learning without Fear" on Preventing and Combating School-Related Gender-Based Violence

Within the massive UN development goal initiatives, the transition from MDGs to SDGs marks an important shift in relation to strategies for tackling gender equality. MDG 3 focused specifically on achieving gender parity in the formal spheres of education, employment, and political representation. SDG 5 works much more broadly and comprehensively with a stronger focus on moving beyond numbers to addressing gender norms and power structures. SDG 5 aims, for example, to end discrimination and violence against women and girls, eliminate harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage, recognize women's unpaid and domestic labor, increase women's participation in decision-making at all levels, improve women's access to land rights as well as sexual and reproductive health rights, and promote the adoption of enforceable legislation to support the empowerment of women and girls. While there are certainly questions about how to reach targets effectively, these goals provide an important focus and structured opportunities in the UN and beyond for developing gender networks and advocacy.

For example, in 2014, the Global Working Group to End SRGBV was established as a coalition of organizations, researchers, and activists working to combat GBV.² Co-hosted by UNGEI and UNESCO, this working group has over 30 members including international organizations, civil society organizations, and other institutions working to support girls' education. Within one year, this working group achieved the following policy commitments (see UNGEI website, 2017).

The Incheon Declaration endorsed at the World Education Forum, Article 8 states: "We recognize the importance of gender equality in achieving the right to education for all. We are therefore committed to *supporting gender-sensitive policies, planning and learning environments; mainstreaming gender issues in teacher training and curricula; and eliminating gender based discrimination and violence in schools.*"

The Sustainable Development Goals 4a: Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and *gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.*

² http://www.ungei.org/news/247_srgbv.html



These types of initiatives provide a critical acknowledgment and framework for addressing SRGBV, and more gender equitable relations. (See Section V about the School Environment for more detailed discussion about SRGBV).

For example, the UNFPA's (2016) recommended "10 essential actions for the 10-year-old girl" focus almost exclusively on structural conditions such as laws, policies, financing, and data management:

Laws:

- 1) Stipulate legal equality for girl, backed by consistent legal practice.
- 2) Ban all harmful practices against girls, and make 18 the minimum marriage age.

Service:

- 3) Provide safe, high-quality education that fully upholds gender equality in curricula, teaching standards and extracurricular activities.
- 4) In working towards universal health care, institute a 10-year-old mental and physical health check-up for all girls.
- 5) Provide universal comprehensive sexuality education when puberty begins.

Policy:

- 6) Institute a rigorous and systemic focus on inclusion, acting on all factors rendering girls vulnerable to being left behind.

Investments:

- 7) Track and close investment gaps in young adolescent girls.
- 8) Mobilize new funds for mental health, protection and reducing unpaid work that constrains options for girls.

Data:

- 9) Use the 2030 Agenda data revolution to better track progress for girls, including on sexual and reproductive health.

Norms:

- 10) Engage girls, boys and all the people around them in challenging and changing gender discriminatory norms. (pp. 90-91)

NGOs and Funding Agencies

Policies influencing the financing and investment in the areas of gender, health, and education sectors also play a critical role in shaping the policy environment in which literacy learning takes place. Critically, the global education sector has raised alarm about how education funding is prioritized by both international donors, as well as national governments. Since 2002, aid to education has dropped from 13 to 10 percent of total aid, while aid in other areas such as infrastructure has increased (Education Commission, 2016). In 2008, aid for basic education in sub-Saharan Africa decreased by 6 percent per capita (UNESCO, 2011) and by 7 percent by between 2010 and 2011 (UNESCO, 2014a). The Education Commission (2016) highlights the following statistics:

- Developing countries spend 2 percent of GDP on education costs that do not lead to learning (p. 7);
- Low-income countries spend 46 percent of their education budgets on the top 10 percent of most educated students (p. 10); and



- Across sub-Saharan Africa just 0.3 percent of education budgets is spent on pre-primary education (p. 10).

In this context of concerns about educational funding, the Education for All Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) was launched in 2002 as a multilateral platform that encouraged low-income countries to develop and strengthen national education strategies and accelerate more efficient and coordinated transfer of donor disbursements and resource allocations to provide free universal primary education. In 2011 the EFA-FTI was rebranded as Global Partnership for Education (GPE) through a series of reforms as an independently governed partnership aiming to improve the efficiency and coordination of education aid. GPE works in partnership with 65 developing countries.

In this context of global funding initiatives, we need to ask what it means to also consider how many other donors, NGOs, and regional governance strategies are also in place, including for example:

- Care's Education Strategy 2020
- DFID Girls' Education Strategy
- DFID Girls' Education Challenge
- WB Education Sector Strategy 2020: Learning for All
- Continental Education Strategy for Africa (2016-2025)
- African Union Agenda 2065
- UNESCO Education Strategy 2014-2021

In a global context where basic education is reportedly underfunded by US\$26 billion every year, dramatic shifts in funding are deemed critical for addressing the global education crisis (UNESCO, 2014a). The Education Commission (2016) report, *The Learning Generation: Investing in Education for a Changing World*, proposes a Financing Compact to spur a massive expansion of education globally through increased financing and reform. This proposal aims to address the inadequacies of current education systems to provide adequate relevant skills for the changing nature of work and economic development, particularly in developing contexts.

Spurred by the UN's first World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, held in Istanbul, Turkey, a number of initiatives aim to improve education during emergencies, including the UK Global Campaign for Education's (2016) *Education Crisis Platform* and ODI's (2016) *Education Cannot Wait* fund. These initiatives work to deliver accelerated and coordinated funding to address continuity in a global context where "education is consistently among the most underfunded and under-prioritized sectors in humanitarian responses, receiving an average less than 2% of humanitarian aid" (GCE-UK, 2016, p. 3).

In many ways, the processes and priorities related to this range of strategies, agendas, and proposals is an entire area of study in and of itself.

National Development and Education Sector Plans

Many countries have National Vision or Development Plans that include both gender and education components. Additionally, many countries produced Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) as conditions for access to WB and IMF debt relief and aid programs, and are currently in the second round of the PRSP process.

Education Sector Strategies (ESPs) are developed in line with the PRSP process, and often take up gender in different ways. GPE (2017) assessed the integration of gender and girls' education in 42 ESPs (29 African country ESPs) and revealed the following three findings:



- Gender disaggregated data is available in the ESPs. However, while intake, access and retention data is available, gender-disaggregated data about gender and learning outcomes is not.
- National statistics may conceal significant regional disparities.
- Regarding female teachers, 31 percent of ESPs reported a lack of female teachers impacting girls' education, but only 13 of 42 ESPs (31 percent) provided data about female teachers in primary education. However, the countries that reported gender disparities in teaching staff were not necessarily the countries that reported about female teachers.

To better address gender in the education sector, GPE and UNGEI (2017) produced a report, *Guidance for Developing Gender-Responsive Education Sector Plans*. Piloted in Eritrea, Guinea, and Malawi, this guide includes the following series of modules:

Module 1: Introducing a gender-responsive approach to education sector planning

Module 2: Assessing the enabling environment for gender equality

Module 3: Applying a gender lens to education sector policy

Module 4: Using data to analyze challenges to gender equality in education

Module 5: Assessing institutional capacity to address gender equality in education

Module 6: Gender-sensitive stakeholder consultation and participation

Module 7: Selecting strategies and interventions to address gender disparities

Module 8: Using costing to inform the choice of strategies and interventions for promoting gender equality

Each module contains clear definitions of terms and concepts, country-specific case studies and examples, and worksheets for assessing and developing gender-responsive ESPs. The guide moves away from fragmented approaches that address only girls' education, to a more relational approach that also includes and values boys' educational success, as well as an intersectional understanding of how gender intersects with other forms of difference and social exclusion. The guide is designed for education planners and practitioners, who might not be gender specialists, to better recognize and address the gender implications of their work. As the guide emphasizes in Module Five, a critical component of conducting gender analysis within education rests on assessing institutional capacity (including structures, skills, competencies, organizational culture, and political will) to address gender. The guide reiterates the importance of more comprehensive work to bring the education sector together with the national gender machinery.

National Gender Machinery: Institutions, Policies and Strategies

National gender machinery constitutes organizational and institutional structures that promote gender equality and the advancement of women (UN Division for the Advancement of Women, 2005). The Beijing Declaration in 1995 intensified the development national machineries, which can include women's or gender ministries, gender bureaus or focal point officers, and gender policies and legislation. Such machinery provides important legal, institutional, and policy mechanisms for addressing gender equality. There are opportunities to better connect this gender machinery with what is happening in the education sector.

Institutional structures

Many countries have institutional structures in place to specifically address girls' education, often working in partnership with UNGEI. For example: Liberia has a Girls' Education Unit in the Ministry of Education; Sierra Leone has a Gender Desk Officer in the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology as well as a Girls' Education Network; and



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Ethiopia has an entire Girls' Education Department in the Regional Bureau of Education. In Ghana, where the Ministry of Education has had a Girls' Education Unit since 1997, every region and district has a Girls' Education Officer (UNGEI, 2017).³ In Kenya, after the 1992 National Conference on the Girl Child in Nyeri and 1994 Symposium on Education of Girls in Machakos, a Gender Unit in the Ministry of Education, Gender and Education Task Force and the Girl Child Project were founded (Chege & Sifuna, 2006).

Laws and policies

Formal and informal laws and policies also play an important role in shaping women and girls' protection from discrimination (Parkes & Heslop, 2013), which, in turn, shapes girls' access to education and learning experiences in school. For example, gender equitable legislation includes banning harmful practices against girls, ensuring the same legal age of marriage for girls and for boys, acknowledging and defining discrimination and domestic violence, and improving access to sexual and reproductive health services. Strengthening such systems involves concerted advocacy work and coalition-building to develop networks of support and influence (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).

A number of African countries have national strategies specifically targeting girls' education. These documents offer critical context-specific tools and visions for gender mainstreaming, empowerment, and equality. Table 1 below shows some examples of gender policies in CODE countries, showing how gender policies can be housed in any number of ministries including gender, family, youth, education, sports, health, or social welfare. This table is not necessarily comprehensive, but offers a starting point for policy analysis.

Table 1: Selected gender and education policies, laws and strategies in CODE countries⁴

Country	Ministry	Date	Policy
Liberia	Ministry of Education	2005	National Policy on Girls' Education
	Ministry of Gender and Development	2009	National Gender Policy
	Ministry of Gender and Development	2009	National Action Plan (UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security)
	Ministry of Education	2010	Education Sector Plan (2010-2020)
Sierra Leone	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs	2000	National Gender Mainstreaming Policy
	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs	2000	National Policy on the Advancement of Women
	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	2009	The code of conduct for teachers and other education personnel in Sierra Leone
	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	2010	National Gender Strategic Plan (2010-2013)
	Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports	2010	National Action Plan (UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security)

³ <http://www.ungei.org/infobycountry/ghana.html>

⁴ Additional girls' education strategies in other African contexts include the National Strategy for Girls' Education in Uganda (2015-2019) and the Girls' Education Strategy for South Sudan (2015-2017).



	Government of Sierra Leone	2011	Education Sector Capacity Development Strategy
	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs	2012	Sierra Leone National Action Plan on GBV (2012-2016)
	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs	2012	National Referral Protocol on GBV
	Ministry of Education	2014	Education Sector Plan (2014-2018)
Ethiopia	Ministry of Women's Affairs	2006	National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2006-2010)
	Ministry of Education	2010	National Girls' Education Strategy
	Ministry of Education	2014	Gender Strategy for the Education and Training Sector
	Ministry of Education	2015	Education Sector Development Programme V (2016-2020)
Mali	Ministere de la Promotion de la Femme, de l'Enfant et de la Famille.	2011	Politique National Genre du Mali
	Direction Nationale de l'Education de Base		Politique nationale pour l'accélération de la scolarisation des filles
Tanzania	Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children	2000	Women and Gender Development Policy
	Ministry of Community Development, Gender and Children	2008	National Strategy for Gender Development
	Ministry of Health and Social Welfare	2011	National Policy Guideline for the Health Sector Prevention and Response to GBV
Mozambique	Ministry of Women and Social Action	2002	National Action Plans for the Advancement of Women (2002-2006) 2007-2009, 2010-2014)
	Government of Mozambique	2004	Family Law Act
	Ministry of Women and Social Action	2007	National Action Plans for the Advancement of Women (2007-2009)
	Ministry of Women and Social Action	2008	National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Violence Against Women (2008-2012)
	Government of Mozambique	2009	Law Against Domestic Violence Perpetrated Against Women Act
	Ministry of Women and Social Action	2010	National Action Plans for the Advancement of Women (2010-2014)
	Ministry of Women and Social Action	2011	National Action Plan on Gender and HIV/AIDS (2011-2015)
Ghana	Ministry of Education	2003	National Education Strategic Plan 2003-2015
	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection	2015	National Gender Policy
Kenya	Republic of Kenya	2000	National Policy on Gender and Development
	Ministry of Gender, Sports, Culture and Social Services	2008	Plan of Action to Implement the National Policy on Gender and Development
	Republic of Kenya	2008	Training Manual on Gender Mainstreaming
	Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development	2011	Gender Policy
	Ministry of Education	2012	A Policy Framework for Education



		(draft)	
	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology	2014	National Education Sector Plan 2014-2018

What Difference Does the Policy Environment Make?

Wide bodies of literature examine the relationships between educational policy and literacy achievements more generally. For example, in South Africa, Brahm Fleisch (2008, 2016) examined the relationship between educational reform and teaching practices. Fleisch found reform to have limited impact on instructional strategies and the work that happens in classrooms. Further, Maringe, Masinire and Nkambule (2015) highlighted the limitations of national broad-brush educational reform because of how these policies make assumptions about the homogeneity of poverty in disadvantaged communities, and leave little space for the unique contextual conditions and distinctive features of particular schools. These South African studies note that for educational policies to be effective, they need to draw on more robust understandings of the nature of teaching practice and instructional change as well as the specific contextualized challenges of individual schools. (These areas are addressed in later sections of this review.)

However, in the context of bringing together gender and education policies, there is a need for more contextualized analysis about the complexities of the policy environment *from a gender perspective*. As the sections above demonstrate, considerable gender mechanisms have been developed; this raises many questions about the difference these policies and tools make at various levels. The ways that global and regional policies are interpreted and taken up in different local and grassroots contexts can be complicated and, at times, conflicting. How policies are operationalized has a significant impact on policy outcomes, requiring careful analysis regarding how policies are formulated, promoted, and put into practice.

In this area, a handful of studies suggest ongoing challenges with how policies are implemented and operationalized. Investigating policy implementation in the areas of gender, education, and poverty reduction in Kenya and South Africa, Unterhalter et al. (2010) interviewed government officials, teachers, and NGO workers and found two important limitations. First, policy texts developed by “small insider groups at the national level” (p. 19) had not involved or been distributed to various local contexts. Many head teachers, teachers, and local NGOs had not seen or received copies of key national policies and were also not familiar with the global movement to address gender in education. NGOs did not frame their work in relation to ongoing discussions about gender and education at the national level.

Second, Unterhalter et al. (2010) found that government officials, teachers, and NGO workers faced difficulties in connecting questions about poverty and gender. Most education ministry officials interviewed described working in silos, and directed gender questions to gender desk or focal point specialists. Prioritizing poverty reduction, many worked with gender-neutral concepts such as families, households, and the belief that poverty affects both boys and girls. Many officials considered gender to be of secondary concern and beyond the scope of their responsibilities. Further, many did not have the language to think about or articulate the gendered dynamics of poverty. In schools, gender was mostly considered in terms of quotas and having equal numbers of boys and girls participate in schooling, while gender stereotypes were replicated in everyday school practices (i.e. gender-based divisions of chores in school).

In Uganda, Jones (2011) used an ethnographic policy research approach to compare the educational concerns of 15 girls at a rural secondary school with Uganda’s National Strategy for



Girls' Education (NSGE).⁵ The girls in this study identified the following critical areas that most concerned them: social location; menstruation; pedagogical practices and attitudes; sexual exploitation and abuse within the school environment; a lack of income-earning opportunities; and domestic responsibilities. Critically, while the NSGE addresses some of these concerns, it does so in a limited way. The NSGE is alarmingly silent on the key areas of menstruation, sexual exploitation and abuse *within the school environment*, and income-earning opportunities for girls (which is particularly relevant given the prevalence of transactional sex as a way for girls to pay for their schooling). Jones concluded that “the NSGE has value as a document that inventories and links a wide range of stakeholders and issues, but it does not propose any radically innovative insights or course of action that would drastically increase gender equity in education” (p. 408). This study raises questions about coordination and the political backing required for the mainstreaming of gender in education.

Section Discussion

Understanding the gender and education policy environment is critical to the design of literacy programs and initiatives that aim to address gender, schooling, and empowerment. How is the policy environment helping or not helping the situation? How are global policies translated and adapted at various levels (especially at school levels)? How do these policies facilitate or inhibit the teaching and learning of literacy, and to what extent does gender play a role? In what ways are these education strategies influencing the experiences of girls and boys in the area of language and literacy learning? In what ways does institutional capacity shape policy implementation, and how do the intentions of the policies remain or change through practice? If the meanings change, how so? To what extent have they played a role, if at all, in transforming gender relations? Are they perpetuating or exacerbating gender violence and inequality? And what is the role of teacher unions in girl's education? These questions related to the policy environment are critical but understudied in the area of gender and literacy. This policy environment plays an important role in framing each of the sections below, but there is a need to better understand how policy connects with practice.

⁵ According to Jones (2011), this NSGE identifies 18 barriers to girls' education, including a range of socio-cultural, school-related as well as political, economic, and administrative factors. The policy also identifies the activities of the key players, organizations, and groups to address the barriers to girls' education, and a list of proposed strategies, resources, indicators, and target dates for each barrier to education.



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II) TEACHING, LEARNING AND LITERACY PRACTICES

Question: What teaching and learning practices support literacy learning, the learning needs of girls, and gender-equitable pedagogies?⁶

1. Not enough is known about the gendered nature of the literacy practices of both young people *and teachers*. Furthermore, a multiliteracies framework suggests the need for more expansive and diverse methodological approaches to literacy research that include traditional,

Section Overview

This section focuses on pedagogy, how young people engage with various forms of texts, and what happens in classrooms. It explores gender differences and expressions of gender in girls' and boys' reading and writing practices, and pedagogical practices for addressing gender and literacy. This section explores a closer and more detailed descriptive

analysis of particular activities, approaches, and interactions in classrooms, and the ways in which these pedagogies shape gender, literacy, and learning. This section highlights the critical role of teachers in both supporting girls' education and addressing gender equality, and suggests the need for a stronger gender component in both pre-service and in-service teacher training.

Gender and Literacy Achievements

Much of the literature regarding gender and literacy in Africa remains focused on one aspect of literacy—measuring and comparing large-scale patterns and trends in reading achievements. This is one of the few areas of gender and literacy research that relies on quantitative methods and statistical analysis. While a detailed review of this data is beyond the scope of this review since findings often note conflicted evidence that varies largely depending on context, the following broad trends are clear:

- 1) Within particular national contexts, the disparities between wealthy and poor segments of the population are often wider than gender disparities, with girls living in poor and rural areas facing the largest barriers. Context, wealth, and socio-economic status play a critical role in reading achievement scores.
- 2) Gender equality in reading achievements and girls' participation in schooling more consistently decrease at higher grade levels.

In many parts of the world, girls routinely score higher than boys in reading achievement. While similar trends are emerging in African contexts, there are significant disparities across countries, but also across different schools within national contexts. However, establishing broad patterns in contexts where reading achievements are often quite low presents methodological challenges. Assessment research suggests that 40 percent of primary school children in sub-Saharan Africa do not complete or achieve minimum learning standards by Grade Four (UNESCO, 2014a). In some regions, many children finish primary school without being able to read all or part of a sentence (see research cited in RTI International, 2015a) and half of 15- to 24-year-olds are not considered literate (UNESCO, 2014a). Also, it is worth noting here that most African countries

⁶ This idea combines questions developed by Miske (2013).



are not included in international reading, math, and science assessments such as PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS. Over the years, scholars working with data from African countries have increasingly incorporated a wider range of factors to account for the complicated nature of reading achievements. In other words, gender cannot be considered as a factor in isolation.

For example, SACMEQ evaluates Grade 6 reading and math achievements in the Southern and Eastern Africa region. Working with SACMEQ I (1995-1999) data,⁷ Saito (1998) found no significant difference in reading achievements between girls and boys. However, with low literacy rates, these findings are uncertain and conflict with widely documented gender disparities in adult literacy. The findings from SACMEQ II (2000-2004) data⁸ demonstrated that girls surpassed boys in reading, while boys surpassed girls in math (Yu & Thomas, 2008). Research consistently shows the significance of school location (urban or rural) and socio-economic status⁹ in reading and math achievements (Lee, Zuze, & Ross, 2005; Saito, 1998; Yu & Thomas, 2008). Higher achievements are linked with more well-resourced and urban schools and higher quality teachers, whereas lower achievements are associated with larger class size and schools that offer learning in shifts (Lee, Zuze, & Ross, 2005). Additionally, the frequency of English spoken and number of books available in the home (both likely indicators of socio-economic status) also significantly affect reading and math achievements (Yu & Thomas, 2008).

One methodological challenge relates to understanding the complicated ways in which gender intersects with poverty. Combining SACMEQ III (2006-2011) data with national census data,¹⁰ Spaul and Taylor (2015) developed an indicator to disaggregate the *interaction* between gender and wealth. This study found “the gap between rich and poor ... considerably larger than the gap between boys and girls” (p. 157). However, poverty significantly exacerbates gender inequalities in basic literacy skills, with girls from poorer households performing considerably worse than boys from the same households, predominantly because of higher dropout or non-enrollment rates among girls. Lesotho stands out atypically, with boys less likely to achieve basic literacy and numeracy skills, a trend that Lefoka (2007) attributed to gendered traditions related to livestock herding as markers of wealth and status. Significant in-country wealth differences affect learning achievements in most countries, and pro-boy trends have an impact on gendered learning differences, particularly in Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Mozambique.

Additional reading assessment tools, such as the Early Grade Reading Assessment (EGRA) that targets primary school children in low-income countries (see RTI International, 2015b), also complicate the relationship between gender and literacy achievement. An RTI International (2014) comparison of EGRA data in five African countries presented varying results. In Liberia, girls have an advantage for each of the three indicators (1) Letter recognition, 2) Ability to read at least one word, and 3) Reading with at least 80 percent comprehension by the end of grade 2 or beginning of grade 3). In the other African countries included in this analysis (Ethiopia, the Gambia, Mali, and Uganda), there is for the most part no statistically

⁷ Includes five countries: Mauritius, Namibia, Zambia, Tanzania (Zanzibar), and Zimbabwe.

⁸ Includes 14 countries: Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania (mainland), Uganda, Zambia, and Zanzibar.

⁹ A composite indicator related to parent education, possessions in the home, quality of the house.

¹⁰ Includes 11 countries: Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.



significant gender difference. Other than Liberia, when there is a gender advantage, boys outperform girls.

Age considerations also have an impact on literacy achievements. In a survey of Grade 6 students in the informal settlements of Nairobi (Kenya), Hungi, Ngware and Abuya (2014) found that students in the 11-year-old age category tended to perform better than the older students in the class, regardless of sex and grade repetition.¹¹ Given the expected age category of 12 years of age for children in Grade 6, this study suggested that earlier exposure to schooling enhances children's literacy achievements. Additionally, students over the expected age tended to perform the most poorly. The study recommended a more rigorous implementation of Kenya's school-age entry policy. The study also suggested the need for more attention to age-differentiated teaching and learning strategies in classrooms.

Achievement scores present useful overviews for understanding broad patterns about the disparities between and across various social groups, and entry points to examine the impacts of educational policy and reform. More detailed gender analysis of literacy achievement scores for various national contexts is available from SACMEQ, PASEC, and from USAID's EdData on EGRA, a full assessment of which is beyond the scope of this review.

However, in the context of developing gender-responsive pedagogies for language and literacy learning, it is important to note that reading achievement assessment scores present a fairly limited perspective on literacy. Reading scores overlook writing completely, and leave many questions about the relationship between gender and the different roles, practices, strategies, and meanings associated with literacies both in and outside of school environments. As many literacy scholars suggest, there is a need to investigate the gendered complexities of literacy practices in order to better understand and address disparities.

Gender and Literacy Practices

Very limited gender analysis explores how young people access, engage with, or produce written texts. Existing research emerges predominantly from South Africa, suggesting the need for more study in other contexts. To deepen how gendered literacy practices are understood, there is a need for greater attention to research methodology, genre, identity, and social relations. This section highlights the need to conceptualize and examine the gendered nature of literacy practices both inside and outside the school environment.

Reading

Olivier and Olivier (2016) suggested that quantitative measures may have limited ability to capture the complexities of gender relations with regard to literacy practices. For example, Cekiso and Madikiza's (2014) quantitative survey of 192 secondary students in the Eastern Cape (all speakers of isiXhosa) studying English as a second language, found that students used very few (pre-, during- or post-) reading strategies. This study did not identify any significant gender differences in the strategies that were used.

A number of qualitative studies nuance more deeply the relationship between gender and literacy practices and include a consideration of language. For example, in ethnographic research about reading for pleasure with a reading club composed of five secondary school girls—all avid

¹¹ This study also compared the students' wealth background as well as school type or geographic location. However, given that all 226 schools were located in urban informal settlements, the authors noted small margins of difference between wealth and location of the students.



readers—in a bilingual English and Xhosa township setting in the Western Cape, Mattos (2013) found that girls use many reading strategies, regardless of whether they are reading in Xhosa or English. These strategies included browsing and skimming to select reading materials of interest, rereading texts multiple times for different purposes, writing down words they do not know, and making connections between written texts and their experiences, other texts, and forms of media.

Mattos (2013) noted how reading for pleasure is often overlooked in literacy research, and worked closely to explore girls' literacy practices across multiple contexts: school (the school had an allotted pleasure reading period—the Literacy Half Hour), home, and community setting (church, choir, NGO activities, an art exhibit, and their reading club). While reading for pleasure, girls' first choice of reading materials included fiction (chapter books and short stories), folktales, poetry, and nonfiction (textbooks, magazines, and newspapers). However, girls sometimes negotiated between reading for pleasure and reading for marks (reading textbooks and curriculum materials). It was important to have a safe space in which girls could help each other practice reading out loud to improve their fluency, and discuss vocabulary. The girls valued having choice, and liked a good story with a plot that unfolds quickly and with themes that relate to youth culture. Mattos characterized girls' literacy practices as hybridized in the sense that girls often combined reading print text with other types of literacy engagement through their reading club activities, including developing story title proposals, improvising oral narratives, developing Q&A sessions, and performing/enacting texts.

Mattos (2013) found that girls did not like going to the library in their community, but liked to keep small personal libraries of reading materials in their bedrooms. When reading at home, girls distinguished between how their reading experiences differed in their bedrooms (personal time), living room (sharing literacy practices with family) and kitchens (using literacy practices in food preparation). They also often shared their reading and literacy experiences with family members, discussing the meaning of vocabulary, sharing and making recipes, and using non-print media texts such as television, music, and movies.

Mattos (2013) also identified the relationship between literacy and girls' attendance at church, or singing in the church choir. Reading, listening to, and discussing excerpts from the Bible and reciting them out loud in front of a group helped girls develop more confident reading skills in meaningful ways that also fulfilled their spiritual needs. One girl brought her highlighter to choir practice, signaling how reading sheet music and song lyrics shape her literacy practices.

Reading and libraries

Without reading materials on which to practice, literacy practices developed through schooling or otherwise can atrophy. Libraries can provide greater access to reading materials, which can help promote and sustain reading culture. Using gender analysis to examine two years' worth of lending records from a community library in Uganda, Kate Parry (2004) identified three trends:

Gendered borrowing patterns: Girls initially showed a preference for borrowing more traditional stories, and eventually branched out to borrow more books about health and morals (much more than did the boys). Girls also borrowed more books in English than boys did, effectively bringing language learning into their homes. Boys preferred modern stories and a wider range of genres. Parry posited that gendered expectations of boys to further their education and seek salaried jobs encourages boys to read widely, including textbooks. Boys' borrowing patterns often reflected the borrowing patterns of their (mostly male) teachers.



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Gendered socialization of reading: Girls incorporated books as part of their social lives more than boys did, leading Parry to suggest that girls might be stronger agents of literacy dissemination. According to the lending data, girls were more likely to share books between themselves, lend books to other readers, and read out loud. Book reports written by borrowers described reading as a social activity, but particularly for girls. Girls were more likely to lend books to other girls and women in their lives, and to share with children. Boys were more likely to lend to other boys and men. Parry posited that because girls have more household chores, girls are more likely to spend more time at home with other family members, providing opportunities to read aloud to each other and discuss books, thus promoting literacy skills among other family members. Boys might have more free time, but be out and about with more distractions.

Location genders library access: The library's rural location (attached to a secondary school) has a gendered impact. Boys are more frequently sent away for schooling or to expensive schools in cities so more girls attended the rural school and therefore used the library. In turn, therefore, the library provided reading opportunities for girls more than for boys. Whereas libraries are often found in cities, this library's rural location had a positive impact on community members most likely to struggle to attain basic literacy skills. Additionally, attached to a secondary school but containing non-curriculum related books (such as books about farming techniques, health, and small businesses), this library offered opportunities for community outreach and non-formal learning activities, which benefited women. This suggests that rural community libraries also offer opportunities to reach out-of-school populations.

Writing

While few studies have reported on the gendered nature of writing practices using quantitative methodologies, one study at the post-secondary level surveyed writing apprehension amongst Afrikaans-speaking undergraduate students in South Africa. In this study, Olivier and Olivier (2016) found more writing apprehension overall in compulsory as opposed to elective courses. However, echoing the Cekiso and Madikiza (2014) survey above about pre-reading strategies, no significant gender differences emerged. The lack of gender differences in these two studies is curious, and perhaps inconclusive.

Several studies about writing using qualitative methodologies have produced some interesting results about the relationship between gender and writing practices. Exploring pieces of writing produced by young people as part of a writing competition in and around Durban, South Africa, the studies below demonstrated the importance of writing as a form of expression to address gender issues, but also the complex ways in which gender is expressed through writing.

Moletsane (2000, 2005) examined over 100 written English texts produced by primary school girls (11- to 13-year-old) and secondary school girls (12- to 17-years-old), who all spoke English as a second language. The girls wrote essays in response to the prompt, *The crimes I have seen*, for a competition facilitated by a project aimed to reduce crime in schools. Mostly in the form of letters to friends or family members, girls wrote about their gendered experiences with violence at home, in school, and in their communities. In their writing, the girls talked about armed robberies and car hijackings, but they also discussed more taboo topics related to gender and sexual violence, including domestic violence, child abuse, and rape. Moletsane (2000) stressed the importance of writing as a mode of communication for addressing silences. "Through writing, girls in particular, are more able to express views and emotions that they otherwise would not communicate in regular male-dominated classrooms or research interviews"



(p. 62). Notably, girls used vivid and expressive language to convey their fear, anger, sadness, and feelings of hopelessness, but also their urgency to fight or talk back, described by Moletsane (2000) as texts that “scream” (p. 65). When girls are addressing sensitive or taboo topics, such as gender norms and violence, writing offers an important mode of communication in creating the space for emotional response within teaching and learning in classrooms.

Unterhalter et al. (2004) examined the letters of secondary students (49 girls and 10 boys aged between 5 and 20) in response to an agony aunt exercise with the prompt:

Write a letter to Sis Dolly about a problem in your life. It can be your own problem, or something about other people, but it must be something real in your life. Then write a reply giving Dolly’s advice (p. 60).

Analysis of student writing in this genre identifies the aspirations and hopes of young people. The first theme identified a strong discourse promoting self-confidence and believing in one’s self as being connected with beliefs about continuing school and educational achievements. The second theme was the importance young people placed on their relationships with their parents, both in terms of seeking approval and support from families, but also with some unsupportive parents as sources of pain. The third theme concerned the young people’s expression of different types of relationship anxieties concerning how sexuality is negotiated. This pointed to the need to understand how teenage sexuality intersects with gender, race, and class.

The need to consider the relationships between language, literacies, and identity might also include the study of storytelling practices. Pippa Stein (2001) explored storytelling with 37 multilingual Class Five 12- to 16-year-old students in a Black township primary school outside Johannesburg. While the language of instruction was English, most students were learning English as a second or third language, and many interwove two or three, sometimes four or five languages including Zulu, Sotho, Venda, Xhosa, Swazi and Afrikaans into their daily lives. Stein developed the multilingual storytelling project in order to counter the deficit and often racist models of education-shaping policy and education discourses about the capabilities of Black students, and identify the linguistic resources that Black multilingual students contribute to learning processes. Combining storytelling, narrative, and video work, Stein described the critical ways in which young people took up and reappropriated storytelling.

What began as a project intending to focus on the uses of multilingualism in storytelling practices unexpectedly turned into an important project in the reappropriation and transformation of textual, cultural and linguistic forms. Students started producing multimodal genres that had previously been infantilized or made invisible by the colonial and apartheid governments. They drew on a combination of African oral storytelling and performance traditions with contemporary film and television performance traditions in order to transform these genres for their own immediate purposes. I argue that the multimodal forms of the texts produced by the students provide evidence for the use of the classroom as a site for a pedagogy of reappropriation and transformation, but this process is dependent on innovative pedagogical practices that challenge dominant practices in schools (Stein, 2001, pp. 151-152).

Positioned as creative agents in the production of stories and knowledge, and working across multiple languages and genres, young people thrived. These studies show how expanded views of literacy that include reading but also writing and storytelling practices offer important sites for studying the complex terrain of the relationship between literacies, identity, and dominant norms related to gender, race, class, and sexuality.



Representing literacy

Expanded views of literacy also compel the study of gender and literacy practices using visual methods. Working with both primary and secondary school girls in rural Uganda, Kendrick and Jones (2008) explored how girls represented literacy using visual methodologies and found the research process to be transformative for some girls. Girls imagined new communities, gained new freedoms, as well as new purpose and entitlement. Through drawing, the younger girls drew their peers and siblings (not teachers and parents), suggesting the important role of peers as competent supporters of learning and literacy. Through photography, the older girls went to places in their communities where they had never been before, imagined new careers, and the implications of literacy in relation to employment opportunities, and paid attention to unequal gender divisions of labor. Visual representations of literacy served as catalysts for discussion about gender roles, expectations, and opportunities.

By giving these girls opportunities to engage with different kinds of texts and images, they observed and participated in the literate practices of other people, and as they added new tools, materials, and technologies to their repertoire, their understanding of who they are allowed to become (Kendrick & Jones, 2008, p. 396).

This study showed the possibilities of visual methods for deepening understandings of the role and meanings of literacies in girls' lives.

Critical literacies

A critical literacy framework centers power, praxis, and social justice in literacy learning. This approach draws traditions of critical pedagogy and the need for literacy education to both identify how social power works but also attempt to transform dominant social relations. South African critical literacy scholar, Hilary Janks (2014) wrote:

A critical approach to education can help us to name and interrogate our practices in order to change them. Critical literacy education focuses specifically on the role of language as a social practice and examines the role played by text and discourse in maintaining or transforming these orders. The understanding and awareness that practices can be transformed opens up possibilities, however small, for social action. (p. 349)

In their introduction to an edited collection of how various teachers employ critical literacies in classrooms around the world, Comber and Simpson (2001) noted that approaches to critical literacy include a diverse range of theoretical and methodological traditions.

To address gender and power in literacy, several South African scholars have taken up critical literacies in the context of secondary schooling. In the early 1990s, Janks (2001) developed a series of critical literacy learning materials to address language and power in secondary schools in South Africa. The *Critical Language Awareness Series* was composed of six workbooks (24 pages each) with activities that required analysis of everyday media texts. In this series, the pilot workbook, *Language and Position*, was developed in collaboration with teachers across seven schools. This workbook builds student understandings of positionality, by working through examples of how physical, geographical, social, and historical positioning influence meaning-making in particular contexts.

Through survey and interview research at one school, evaluating the responses of 57 Grade 10 students (including both Black and White students, aged 15 to 16), Janks (2001) found



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an overwhelmingly negative response to the pilot workbook for two reasons. First, the student found the workbook boring because it was repetitive in its messaging about positioning. Second, the workbook sparked conflicts at the intersection of race and gender in the classrooms. In particular, the question of who should look after the children divided the class sharply, with the White students (the girls especially) and White female teacher supporting gender equality and the Black students (the boys especially) defending the patriarchal view that women should raise children. Notably, at another school, attended predominantly by Black students, this question did not generate controversy but promoted successful discussions about culture and diversity. Janks wrote, “We had not anticipated . . . the extent to which students might be invested in their own meanings; the extent to which students might feel the need in their class and in their school to win power and recognition for their own meanings and be unable to value the meanings of others” (p. 149). Locating the research in 1991, Janks contextualized the significance of race and anti-apartheid struggles in constructing the political climate in South Africa at the time, to suggest a culture of schooling that alienated Black students, and how this may have affected student investments in particular meanings. Janks explained:

Where students have been schooled to believe that meaning is singular and that there are right or wrong answers, it becomes important for them to convince the others that their position is right. There is a great deal at stake where, if one is not right, one is necessarily wrong (pp. 145-146).

Other researchers in South Africa have expanded on this work. Balfour (2003), for example, identified three key teaching and learning strategies for addressing gendered norms, values, and behaviors.

1) Learning materials need to be carefully selected. Stories that morally condemn inequitable forms of behavior or violence create enabling contexts for both engaging girls to speak up, but also for engaging boys to resist dominant ideologies that inform stories, and the underlying assumptions behind them. This helps boys to see their mutual responsibility for addressing gender inequality.

2) Learners need to consider the author’s perspective in order to unsettle the uncritical acceptance of the author’s word. Identifying the author’s point of view, questioning the author’s intentions, considering what lessons the author is teaching, and what lessons readers are learning are essential. Thinking about the author’s obligations and problematic silences is instructive. Thinking through authorship also enables critical speculation and the opportunity for learners to *rewrite* parts of the story to counter silences, stereotypes, and exclusion.

3) Teachers and students need the *language* and critical vocabulary to address complex gender issues. The pedagogical purpose is to extend language use when the subject matter relates to students’ own interests, but takes them beyond accustomed boundaries of discussion in their community. Combining text, language extension, and social critique enable the development of awareness about patriarchal norms and collective power to question traditional roles.

What happens in the classroom is that pupils themselves are authorized to pronounce on what they read, and to formulate their opinions on this new matter [gender relations], which obliges them to acquire new vocabulary, or use their existing vocabulary in new situations. (Balfour, 2003, p. 197)

However, several scholars documented the challenges they faced implementing critical literacies in the classroom. Working with Grade 9 students in a secondary school in Durban, Ralfe (2009) found that students’ low literacy and language proficiencies limited their comprehension of texts, negatively affecting their abilities to decode critically the exploitation of



women in visual texts, such as ads. Ralfe suggested that basic literacy skills are an important precondition for critical literacy to be effective.

Drawing on critical literacies in her work with secondary school students in KwaZulu-Natal, Nokokhanya Ngcobo (2016) expanded the range of texts to be used, and built in a critical framework for discussion. She used a variety of types of isiZulu texts, including folktales, songs, poems, films, and drama to address HIV and gender in students' mother tongue language. She reports that she found it difficult, in a short time, to challenge learners' beliefs and attitudes entrenched in patriarchal culture and norms. Grade 11 learners took ownership of the texts, engaged in multiple interpretations that unsettled the notion that texts have only one meaning, learned critical thinking/analysis skills (reading texts and writing texts), and applied ideas to their lives and to wider society. Working within a critical literacy framework, Ngcobo (2012, 2015, 2016) found that the film, *Yesterday*, in isiZulu, offered a way for viewers to engage with and reflect on critical systemic challenges in everyday life. By entering the world of the characters, the students explored dominant cultural norms and their own subjective positions as viewers. Her study also highlighted the need for teachers and learners to identify and explore their own internalized attitudes and beliefs about dominant cultural norms in their development of critical literacies.

At a Black township high school in Cape Town, Lloyd (2016) found that teachers limited student learning by positioning Black women in particular ways and by reinforcing reluctance to interrogate or challenge power relations. Lloyd stressed the importance of alternative models of teaching and learning that focus on learners' experiences and investment in learning, with particular attention paid to how teachers work with ideas about gender in the classroom.

Any critical literacy approach will have limited impact at transforming gender relations over the short-term duration of a lesson or a workshop if it is not combined with efforts to address the nature of gender and power (and the relationship between them) beyond the curriculum in schools, teacher education programs, and in communities. The implementation of critical literacies in ways that are demonstrably responsive to linguistic and cultural diversity, language and literacy educators foreground learner and teacher identities at the intersection of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation; this is central to effective critical literacies pedagogy in diverse classrooms (McKinney & Norton, 2008). While a well-developed body of literature about critical literacies, multimodality, and multiliteracies has emerged from South Africa (such as the work of Hilary Janks, Pippa Stein, and Denise Newfield) there is a dearth of gender analysis in this area, thus offering important opportunities for taking up questions about gender and identity in multiliteracies research.

Gender and language in relation to literacy

Central to work in critical literacies is a concern for gender and language more broadly. Limited research investigates gender and language in Africa. Atanga, Ellece, Litosseliti, and Sunderland (2013) begin their landmark edited collection, *Gender and Language in Sub-Saharan Africa*, with the following passage.

Gender is not a straightforward concept to research and write about, not least because it is so wide-ranging. In terms of language ... gender pertains to both talk and written text. Conceptually, we can talk about gender relations, gender identities and gendered practices, always remembering that gender and sexuality are closely related. And while the term gender is often used in relation to the social construction of female and male people, it may be more useful to see



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gender as a set of ideas, i.e. what is thought, said and written about women, men, girls and boys: what they are like and do, what they should be like and should do. These ideas are often expressed through gendered discourses.

Such ideas are, of course, highly contingent: they vary with context. The broad geographical context in question here is sub-Saharan Africa, although this consists of a huge diversity of smaller, shifting contexts and Communities of Practice. Sub-Saharan Africa is an important epistemological site for the study of gender and language: while gender is relevant across the globe, empirical studies of gender and language have to date been carried out largely in the USA, Canada, Australasia and Europe, the ‘global North.’ While this imbalance is changing, [...] published sociolinguistic and discourse analytical work on gender and language in relation to African contexts remains scarce and scattered. (p. 1)

As part of this project, Atanga et al. compiled an excellent and comprehensive bibliography of scholarship about gender, sexuality, and language in African contexts (see Appendix C). While a full discussion of this is beyond the scope of this review, this bibliography highlights the need for gender and literacy research and interventions to attend to *discourse* and the ways in which language constructs and reinforces gendered relations and inequalities in many different ways, from everyday utterances and interactions to the specific function of word processing programs in the construction of written texts. For example, while not specific to African languages, Thune, Leonardi, and Bazzanella’s (2006) edited collection explores how gender is lexically and socially categorized in the *Microsoft Word Thesaurus* (including chapters about thesauri in Chinese, Czech, Dutch, English, German, Greek, Italian, Polish, Portuguese, Spanish, Hebrew, Hungarian, and Turkish). Just as dictionaries are not neutral sources of meaning, this study demonstrates how thesauri also reflect hierarchical gender belief systems. Women and men are positioned in particular ways through the thesaurus, for example, through the use of masculine generics and because many languages (particularly Romance languages) work inherently within the gender binary to assign masculine or feminine status to every noun.

With concerns about quality education and the relationship between Indigenous or minority, and colonial or majority languages, there are important opportunities to explore more deeply the relationship between gender and language as well as literacy learning. To develop this area, research might for example draw on the books, *Gender and Language Research Methodologies*, edited by Harrington, Litosseliti, Sauntson, and Sunderland (2008) and the edited collection by Atanga et al. (2013) mentioned above.

Language of instruction

With the exception of the work of Carol Benson (2002, 2004, 2005) and Mart Hovens (2002), limited research investigates gender and mother tongue instruction in African contexts.

With regard to the gender issue which is often evoked in this context, there appears to be no in-depth research available on which to establish a robust connection between the use of mother tongue in primary education (or bilingual education involving the mother tongue) and girls’ school participation and success in sub-Saharan Africa (Wolff, 2011, p. 85).

However, the detrimental impacts of the use of colonial languages such as English and French is well documented more generally.

The effects of using English, rather than Indigenous languages, as the medium of teaching and learning in Africa has led to enormous inequalities in the education



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system for the majority of children and families who use local languages at home and who do not have access to the material and symbolic resources of English.

(Stein & Newfield, 2006, p. 3)

Given how language is one of the primary ways in which social inequalities are reproduced and maintained, “the learners’ mother tongue holds the key to making schooling more inclusive for all disadvantaged groups, especially for girls and women” (Benson, 2005, p. 1).

Carol Benson (2002, 2004, 2005) advocated for a bilingual model of education in which learners begin their schooling in their first, or mother tongue language and eventually transition to a second language. Comparing the reading, writing, and math skills of almost 3000 students across monolingual schools and experimental bilingual programs in Guinea-Bissau and Niger, Hovens (2002) specifically identified rural children and girls as those who benefit the *most* from bilingual programs when they began their schooling in their mother tongue. Benson (2002, 2004, 2005) further enumerated a number of reasons why girls benefit specifically from bilingual education programs that include mother tongue education.

- More girls enroll in school because girls and their families are more likely to view schooling as relevant and reflective of their family values and culture;
- Girls develop stronger basic literacy skills (which are then transferable to second language learning) and understand more academic content at a younger age (rather than postponing more complex concepts and skills);
- Girls are more competent to express their full range of knowledge and experience, and confident to participate in classroom discussions;
- Girls can better *demonstrate* their understanding, such that teachers are more likely to evaluate girls more positively, be considered ‘good’ students, and have higher expectations for girls’ performance;
- Girls stay in school longer;
- Families’ increased commitment to and participation in girls’ education through more effective home-school communication about schooling process and more family involvement in decision-making at the school level;
- Teachers from the same linguistic and cultural communities treat girls more fairly, and are less likely to exploit female students;
- Families are more likely to trust teachers who speak their language; and
- More women may become teachers and, thus, role models for girls.

Drawing on Benson’s work, Miske (2013) concluded that “teachers who speak the mother tongue of the girls and use proven bilingual teaching strategies are particularly effective in responding to the learning needs of girls from disadvantaged groups” (p. 9). Close ethnographic literacy research with girls (and boys) offers opportunities to deepen understanding of the role of language, furthering support for bilingual models of education.

The work of Mattos (2013), as cited in a previous section, offers a good example of how this works. In a Black township setting in South Africa, Mattos used ethnographic methods to compare girls’ literacy practices reading for pleasure across Xhosa and English. The girls valued bilingualism as an important asset for skills development. However, the girls found reading in Xhosa difficult because it was more challenging to decode the clicking sounds. They did not consider themselves to be good Xhosa readers. Also, written Xhosa (so called deep Xhosa) often has more extensive vocabulary as compared with everyday spoken Xhosa. The girls found Xhosa easier to speak than it was to read, and they enjoyed listening to Xhosa texts read by their



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teachers because of how the teachers embodied and performed the stories. The girls appreciated how Xhosa texts reflected their local contexts such as places they know, familiar stories and cultural narratives, all of which are important for connecting the texts with their lives and experiences.

Often, the girls preferred reading in English because they found it easier to read, and valued English for furthering their education. They perceived themselves to be good English readers. But, also, the girls appreciated the different content material in English texts because it was *different* from their everyday context. One girl in Mattos's (2013) study, Nomathemba, explained why she likes reading in English:

It's like exploring something in English because when I go home, everyone speaks Xhosa. But when I read English, its like a whole new different world ... everyone does things different from us [...] Its like I'm exploring another culture through reading. When I read [in] Xhosa, it's what I know [...] But when I'm reading in English-when I'm reading an Indian story written in English, I'm exploring that person's culture [...] Those books [in Xhosa] that have those things that every Xhosa person knows... that to be a man, a boy has to go to the woods... stuff like that. It's the stuff I know... [...] It's not something I want to read because I do know that. But in English I read about many things I've never heard of. That's what I love... I love to explore different worlds. (p. 154)

This is not to suggest that Xhosa texts are not important. These girls' perspectives suggest the need for multiple kinds of texts in different languages, and the need for texts in local languages to take up a wider variety of content and topics that both reflect young people's lives and also expose them to different cultures and worlds. Critically, Nomathemba drew on an example of a Xhosa text that reinscribed traditional gender practices. She wanted something different. The element of discovery, exploration, and learning *different* cultural norms was an important factor influencing *how* girls selected the language of their reading materials.

To complicate this discussion, in diverse multilingual environments where it can be challenging to provide education in each child's mother tongue, scholars raise questions about the relationship between using a local *lingua franca* and other dominant or colonial languages. For example, in multilingual urban low-income areas of Nairobi, Hungi, Njagi, Wekulo, and Ngware (2017) found that pre-primary-aged students consistently performed better in learning literacy skills when the language of instruction was Kiswahili, as opposed to English. The authors posited that while neither English nor Kiswahili was the students' mother tongue, Kiswahili is spoken more widely in this context as a *lingua franca* and was therefore a more familiar language.

Language needs to be a significant consideration in any feminist approach, especially given the multilinguistic nature of many contexts in Africa, and how the most marginalized communities often lack access to the formal languages of schooling (often typically a colonial language, or other dominant/prestige language). Specifically, women are less likely to have access to colonial or prestige languages (Benson, 2002). With scholarship increasingly positioning English as an African language, this suggests the need for more research about the gendered implications of this positioning.

New literacies and multiliteracies: ICTs, mobile phones and media

An exploding area of multiliteracies research explores the relationship between literacy and information and communication technologies (ICTs), under the umbrella of new literacies



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associated with screens and the internet. The International Reading Association's (2009) position statement, *New Literacies and 21st Century Technologies*, reads:

To become fully literate in today's world, students must become proficient in the new literacies of 21st century technologies. As a result, literacy educators have a responsibility to effectively integrate these new technologies into the curriculum, preparing students for the literacy future they deserve. (p. 1)

Within these expanded ideas about the 'what' and the 'how' of literacy learning, digital literacies are critical for women's and girls' empowerment and education. With the number of smartphones in sub-Saharan Africa expected to more than triple by 2020 (GMSA, 2015, cited in UNESCO, 2016b), this has enormous gendered implications. The following statements from a UNESCO (2016b) brochure connect gender, digital technologies, and internet communication.

The next 1 billion new internet connections will be from mobile devices in the hands of young people in developing countries. (p. 2)

In developing countries, up to 43% fewer women have access to internet than men. (Dalberg, 2012, cited on p. 6)

Mobile technology could help lift 5.3 million women out of illiteracy by 2020. (Vodafone Foundation, 2014, cited on p. 6)

In a Plan International blog, Chief Executive Officer Anne-Marie Albrechtsen (2017)¹² also highlighted the relationship between gender equality and digital technologies access and use.

Gender equality is impossible without digital skills for girls. (n.p.)

The gender digital divide is entirely man-made. (n.p.)

In this context, growing numbers of projects and interventions work with girls to introduce digital technologies, devices, and coding skills. The *60 Million Girls* Foundation has established mobile learning labs in Sierra Leone, equipped with devices fully loaded with content accessible offline.¹³ Other work involves youth more centrally in the *development* of digital platforms. UNESCO's (2016b) YouthMobile Initiative teaches young girls and boys to create mobile apps for sustainable development. Focusing on youth in developing contexts with a strong, explicit focus on engaging girls and young women, YouthMobile introduces programming (learning-to-code) and problem solving (coding-to-learn). Inspired by the work of Kenyan entrepreneur Martha Chumo teaching youth mobile app development in informal settlements in Nairobi, this new initiative aims to find and train 1000 young female entrepreneurs

¹² <https://plan-international.org/blog/2017/04/gender-equality-impossible-without-digital-skills-girls#>

¹³ http://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/after-school-use-mobile-technologies-sierra-leone-makes-learning-fun?utm_source=Global+Partnership+For+Education&utm_campaign=3aa121c7c0-English+Campaign+-+2017-05-11-07-15-02&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_90856a3035-3aa121c7c0-173912909



like Martha, and train 1000 young girls to develop, promote, and sell mobile technologies (UNESCO, 2016b). Since 2016, British NGO Theirworld has partnered with local organizations in Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria on a Code Clubs¹⁴ project that teaches girls coding and digital skills, including how to build a computer, work with HTML, CSS & Java, and how to build a website.

Amid these exciting projects, however, there is the need to investigate more deeply the implications of digital spaces and technologies for the development of literacy learning and practices. In a randomized evaluation of an adult literacy program across 113 villages in Niger, Aker, Ksoll and Lybbert (2012) found that basic training in the use of simple mobile phones¹⁵ substantially improved the educational outcomes of all participants (regardless of region, gender, or age), in particular in writing and math test scores. In Egbe and Muodumogu's (2014) survey of the perspectives of 200 university students and professors at two universities in Nigeria they found that the ownership and use of mobile phones and online social networking platforms promoted reading, particularly among younger respondents (aged 16-20). (Respondents over 30 disagreed that digital practices promote reading). In this study, the most popular internet literacy activities included searches to locate information online, browsing new journals and newspapers, and social networking.

A few studies explore the particular relationship between gender, mobile learning, and informal literacy practices. Here, mobile learning is “any kind of learning that happens when the learner is not at a fixed, predetermined location or when the learning happens through taking advantage of the learning opportunities offered by mobile technologies” (O'Malley et al., 2005, p. 6, cited by Velghe, 2014, p. 11). This body of work explores how mobile phones provide important informal learning and the development of literacy practices among out-of-school populations. A number of studies examine, for example, women's mobile phone use in relation to literacy practices. For example, Sanya and Odero (2017) found that women from rural areas of Kenya who self-identify and would be classified as illiterate to be, in practice, functionally literate. With the rapid expansion of mobile banking applications, such as M-Pesa, Kenyan feminist organizations launched a nationwide educational campaign about the gendered implications of Kenya's new (2010) constitution through text messaging; women's communications with their family members, women's mobile literacies offer important pedagogical sites of change. Being active mobile phone users expanded women's opportunities for different forms of communication, ultimately shifting their citizenship status and political engagement through literacy. Velghe's (2014) work with women between the ages of 40 and 65 in poor communities in Cape Town, South Africa, also positions women's use of mobile phones for various communication purposes (sending text messages, listening to music, taking pictures, and saving contact lists) as emergent communities of practice with important implications for informal literacy learning.

The evolving use of mobile phones for literacy practices—mobile literacies—also has potential for reaching displaced populations and those on the move. Through long-term research

¹⁴ <https://www.newsdeeply.com/womenandgirls/articles/2017/05/04/teaching-ugandan-girls-to-code-to-keep-them-in-school>

¹⁵ This training included turning the phone on and off, familiarity with numbers and letters on the device, making and receiving calls, and writing and reading short text messages.



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at refugee camps in Kenya, Dryden-Peterson, Dahya, and Douhaibi (2017)¹⁶ studied how teachers use mobile phones as education tools. They found that teachers used their mobile phones to access social media platforms like Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp in order to access information for classroom instruction, as well as to connect with other teacher networks about problems coming up in their classrooms. Online chat tools and user groups offered important teacher-to-teacher mobile mentoring. Additionally, teachers initiated social media conversations with the men in refugee camp communities about the importance of girls' education, stimulating conversations about gendered social norms.

Amid this evidence that digital technologies can enhance literacy teaching and learning, scholars also raise a number of questions. Investigating digital literacies in the context of South Africa, Prinsloo (2005) challenged how new literacies scholarship implicitly emerged from theorizing literacy practices of middle-class and predominantly American, European, Australian, and Asian contexts that have fairly wide distributions of computers and Internet connectivity. This assumed context and generalizability, Prinsloo contested, has resulted in a restricted view of new literacies as a set of skills (such as using search engines, email, and word processors). The exciting possibilities of experimentation, self-instruction, and creativity associated with new literacies “only works when such digitally-rich out-of-school encounters with computers are available to children, which is not the case [in South Africa]” (p. 11). Prinsloo (2005) advocated considering new literacies as *placed* resources. This idea centers on how the study of new literacies needs to consider the uneven nature of globalization—moving beyond the logic of digital divides—to examine the formative and constraining role of power, context, and place in shaping digital literacy practices (Prinsloo, 2005; Prinsloo & Roswell, 2012).

Youth as both consumers and producers of media

Given how the media plays a pivotal role in influencing public opinion and discourse, social justice approaches to literacy education need to address critical readings of media texts (Janks, 2001). Here, media texts include a wide range of media forms such as television, radio, film/video, and social media.

Exploring the media consumption of girls aged 10-22 years of age and their guardians in Ethiopia, Girl Hub (2012) compared various sources of information, including “word of mouth” (oral communication), TV, radio, mobile phones, schools, professionals such as teachers and health workers. This report noted that because of a low reading culture in Ethiopia, print text is the least use form of media.

Girls' media consumption: Girls rely most commonly on oral communication as the source of information that is relevant to their daily lives. However, most girls see “word of mouth” as untrusted, unreliable, distorted, and misused. Girls positioned more formalized communication pathways such as TV and radio as sources of trusted information because they are institutionalized, with TV being more trusted than radio. In rural areas, less than 50 percent of girls have access to formal media outlets so they often rely on informal sources of information including religious institutions, schools, market place, health posts, and neighborhood ward offices. Girls also trust information from professional women in the community, such as teachers

¹⁶ https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2017/03/14/how-teachers-use-mobile-phones-as-education-tools-in-refugee-camps/?utm_campaign=Brookings%20Brief&utm_source=hs_email&utm_medium=email&utm_content=45372247



and health extension workers, and often rely on these women for advice and information. However, girls in rural areas wanted more role models of successful women. While most girls do not have their own mobile phones, girls easily access them (often in the evenings) and use them for free entertainment such as playing games, listening to music or the radio, or taking pictures (although not for calling or messaging because of the cost). In general, girls also wanted access to more educational information through formal media sources to help them become better educated as well as to influence their families to support girls' education.

Guardians' media consumption: Guardians mainly rely on oral communication as a source of information in their daily lives, and evaluate this source as more reliable and trustworthy than girls do. In terms of formal pathways, TV was the most trusted source, followed by radio. Men and boys tend to control formal media in the household, with fathers and then boys prioritizing what the family will watch or listen to. Guardians worry that the media will negatively influence their daughters' behaviors. Mothers in particular see mobile phones as a path to negative behavior such as watching pornography, receiving erotic messages, and having unsafe sex.

Both girls and their guardians view religious institutions as key places for sharing trusted information. Girls and guardians also identify schools as the best, quickest and most efficient way to share information widely in rural areas. Exploring literacy practices through media consumption offers important gendered insights about the types of sources of information and communication that are trusted by different community members. However, it is also important to consider the ways in which young people are not only consumers but also producers of media and knowledge.

In an after-school journalism club at a residential girls' secondary school in Kenya, Kendrick, Chemjor, and Early (2012) considered literacy practices through the concept of girls as media producers. In this club, girls used the ICTs introduced to the group (digital cameras, voice recorders, and laptops with connectivity) as placed resources (referring to Prinsloo, 2005) in relation to traditional print-based materials. Within the after-school club, "the introduction of new ICT resources, when situated within collaborative practices (both research and pedagogical), can result in enhanced literacy learning and text production" (Kendrick, Chemjor, & Early, 2012, p. 297). The digital tools served as catalysts, creating interpersonal spaces for creative play, exploration, experimentation, and engagement towards more diverse and transformative types of literacy practices. The authors note how the trajectory of girls' identities and investment in being journalists developed over time, extending from the club space to a more public sphere as the girls moved from covering local and national issues and being published in international spaces. However, the authors noted that these practices could occur only outside formal classrooms because of how traditional top-down teaching practices, structures, and the focus on exams restrict and limit student agency and participation. The authors also cautioned against romanticizing digital tools, and outlined a number of ethical dilemmas that emerged, including other schoolgirls being expelled from school as a result of the journalism club participants' occasional use of underground investigative reporting to record their peers.

In South Africa, Weibesiek (2015) examined youth engagement with literacy materials through social networking platforms developed for use on mobile phones. Working with Crystal's ideas about *textspeak* as an abbreviated form of language that emerged in relation to the development of technologies such as text and instant messaging, Weibesiek defined textspeak as "a non-standard form of written language that makes use of a number of linguistic processes including acronyms, abbreviations, and non-standard orthography" (p. 108). Common examples



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of textspeak include *lol* (laugh out loud), *2 c u* (to see you) and *b4* (before). While controversial, Weibesiek positions textspeak as an important literacy practice because it requires readers and writers to already have considerable literacy awareness such as the sounds of letters and numbers, word order, the creativity to manipulate linguistic rules and play with abbreviated forms, and visual memory. Focusing specifically on the interactive discussion boards related to the short story, *The Good Girl*, by Lauri Kubuitsile distributed by the FunDza Literacy Trust, she found these digital spaces to encompass multiple different types of literacy practices. Young people's use of textspeak demonstrated promising levels of both traditional (reading and writing) and social aspects (ideologies of texts, such as representations of femininities and masculinities) of literacy activities. Thus, users engaged critically with digital texts, displaying critical literacy in relation to addressing gender norms related to femininity, masculinity, and transactional sex.

Pedagogy and Curriculum

To address social power and gender norms in relation to gender empowerment, there is a general consensus in the literature about the need to combine participatory and learner-centered pedagogies. Curricula that promote critical thinking, learner-centered pedagogies, and problem-solving skills play an important role in empowerment processes for girls and boys (Marcus & Page, 2016). However, little research seems to have included a gender analysis of national curricula documents. Additionally, there seems to be little in-depth study about the relationship between gender and instructional strategies, such that debates about, for example, scripted lessons, pacing, sequencing, instructional coaching, and *how* different types of teaching and learning materials are used within classroom environments (see Fleisch, 2016) have not yet been taken up from a gender perspective. Most researched gender-responsive pedagogy reflects the context of addressing SRGBV (as discussed further in Section IV below about a gender-responsive whole-school approach). This means that there are important opportunities to continue investigating the relationship between gender and the teaching and learning activities that occur in classrooms. Notably, teachers are positioned as key agents for shaping classroom practices.

Additionally, this means paying attention to difference and the particular experiences and learning needs of girls with disabilities, girls living in rural areas, girls living in poverty, Indigenous girls, and girls who do not speak dominant languages. With the need to attend to the different experiences of girls and boys, Unterhalter et al. (2010) note the need for more complex thinking about intersecting processes. This means not just thinking about gender, but using an intersectional approach that examines how gender intersects with, for example, poverty, language, culture, age, and Indigeneity. Additionally, it is important to recognize that gender and sexuality play a critical distinguishing role shaping other forms of identity, such as race and class. In Black township schools in Durban, South Africa, Unterhalter et al. (2004) found that students expressed their racialized and class-based identities *through* accounts of gender and sexuality. Intersectionality presents particular sets of challenges in finding accessible language and tools to effectively complicate gender and integrate multi-layered forms of analysis: "While translating complex ideas into practice is immensely difficult, the development of a working language and the formulation and application of analytical frames are important precursory steps" (Unterhalter et al., 2010, p. 22).



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Teachers and teaching

In general, teachers are identified as both key perpetrators of gender inequality and key agents for addressing gender equality.

An apparently sexist text can be addressed critically by the teacher and/or learners; by the same token, a progressive, egalitarian one can be interpreted by a conservative teachers in non-progressive ways (Jones et al., 1997, cited in Balfour & Ralfe, 2006, pp. 526-527).

Teachers need to support gender equality and be aware of what it means to take up a gender approach. This means supporting women teachers *and* offering ongoing gender training to all teachers, as part of both pre-service and professional development training. Pillay (2015) wrote: “Teachers are themselves gendered beings with their own attitudes to and experiences of gender inequality and violence ... such attitudes and experiences need to be addressed” (p. 90). Gender stereotypes inform the approaches, attitudes, and expectations of teachers, but also how students, school leadership, and communities perceive teachers. Teachers negotiate their individual gender identities as well as wider discourses about teacher identities, all of which affect their educational philosophies and the pedagogical choices they make in schools (Chege, 2006). Teachers’ levels of gender sensitivity and self-awareness are considered a key determinant in their ability to deliver gender-responsive pedagogies and support gender equality in the classroom. Two important studies from South Africa exemplify transformative approaches to teacher education.

The first study reports on Participatory Action Research addressing gender with 66 pre-service teacher education in the 3rd and 4th year of a Bachelor of Education program. Using an approach similar to Balfour’s (2003) gender work with novels in a secondary school environment, Pillay (2015) worked with a number of different literary texts (novels, plays, and films)¹⁷ in the context of English Education. Over the course of two years, Pillay investigated the extent to which “literary texts can be used as catalysts to interrogate issues of gender inequality and violence” (p. 90). At the beginning of the study, Pillay found that while the student teachers (mostly women) denounced gender violence, many articulated sexist values in their interpretations of the literary texts, effectively accepting the status quo and upholding patriarchal norms. Whereas the student teachers could initially identify sexist behaviors, they did not challenge these ideas. Using an approach informed by critical pedagogy, Pillay worked with the students to gradually confront and unpack these values. Through a series of courses, Pillay took up different literary theories, including practical criticism, reader response, new historicism, cultural materialism, and Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial theories. As part of this work, the student teachers contextualized literary texts so as to explore how the roles assigned to women and men in the texts either supported or undermined the social and political system of the time period of the text. Pillay explained, “By historicizing the texts, we had to consider how the society represented in the text treated men and women and how the author chose to represent them” (p. 92). An important aspect of this work was to identify how and why particular characters in the texts succeeded or failed, and to make connections with the participants’ own lives and work as teachers. Over time and through extensive discussion and reflection, by the end

¹⁷ These included: *The Madonna of Excelsior* by Zakes Mda, *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy, *Sophiatown* by The Junction Avenue Theatre Company, *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, *The Colour of Paradise* directed by Majid Majidi, and *Much Ado About Nothing* directed by Kenneth Branagh.



of the study, the student teachers developed more critical awareness of the characteristics of patriarchy, the ways in which gender norms and stereotypes are internalized, and different conceptualizations of masculinity and femininity.

The second study reports on an in-service teacher education model that addressed teachers' literacy practices. The Limpopo Province Department of Education provided bursaries to 200 experienced and practicing primary school teachers to temporarily leave their teaching posts and complete a 4-year Bachelor of Education degree at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg. Gennrich (2016) explored the experiences of two of these teachers, both women, in a 3-week *English in Education* module as well as in the Bachelor of Education program more generally. Here, exposure "to experiences working with different genres of text for an extended time, in different fields" and semi-structured reflection (reflective journals, focus groups, interviews) about the "discontinuities between old and new ways of practice" played a critical role in shifting "deeply entrenched ways of thinking about and valuing literacy" (p. 1). Gennrich highlighted the critical role of *imagination* and the study of *genre* in disrupting the familiar to expanding and transforming in-service teachers' literacy practices and pedagogies.

Literacy teachers need experiential, hands-on opportunities to read, write and analyse genres of texts different to those they usually work with and in ways that are unlike the familiar, established and entrenched pedagogies they use and know for an awareness of the possibilities these hold to be imagined. (p. 8)

Students' perceptions of teachers

Students' perceptions of their teachers also play an important role in the teaching and learning process. Students from 20 primary schools across Tanzania reported a list of concerns about their teachers (O-saki & Agu, 2002): "Collecting money from the children without issuing receipts; segregating pupils on the basis of intelligence; failing to introduce visitors to the children [...]; poor observance of lesson times; failure to account for income and expenditure (relating to school self-reliance harvests produced by the children); having sexual relations with pupils; favouring teachers' children; coming to school drunk; not teaching the classes; not distributing textbooks to children; dressing immodestly; withholding academic reports from pupils who failed to contribute to school collections; failing to teach all lessons in English; and books lost in teachers' offices" (p. 111). Many of these concerns provoke disconcerting questions, and there is a need to consider these concerns in relation to the dominant culture of schooling and broader structural factors that affect teachers and school administrators.

Importantly, students' also have gendered perceptions of their teachers. Students from across seven countries in Eastern and Southern Africa constructed their teachers, but particularly their male teachers, as violent, intimidating, impersonal, and abusive bullies, whereas female teachers were constructed as caring, empathetic, and motherly (Chege, 2006). All this research needs to inform gender-responsive teacher education.

Teacher identities and beliefs

Generally, research shows that most teachers explicitly believe boys to be more capable than girls in most areas; this influences how teachers teach boys and girls differently. The studies below provide evidence that teachers' beliefs about gender consistently influence what happens in classrooms across all levels of schooling, as well as across subject areas. This suggests the need for deeper work in teacher education about patriarchy and gendered social norms and values.



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In her observations of the everyday interactions of 15 4- and 5-year-old children and their teacher in a pre-school in Gabarone, Botswana, Letsholo (2013) found gendered behavior that perpetuated stereotypes and male domination. While the teacher tried to allow children to take turns, the boys tended to interrupt and use louder voices, attracting more attention from the teacher and effectively controlling conversations. The teacher also assigned gender stereotypical roles to boys as doctors, and as house builders, and to girls as mothers looking after babies and young children. Boys were assigned supervisory responsibilities in the classroom.

Qualitative interview and observation research in both Grade 2 and 5 French and math classrooms in primary schools in Senegal and Cameroon found that teachers believed boys to be naturally better at math and girls to be naturally better at French, and evaluated students' achievements accordingly. They also gave more attention and energy to the learning of boys (FAWE, 2011).

O-saki and Agu (2002) found that primary school teachers in Tanzania firmly believed boys to be more outgoing, confident, intellectually active, and better able to answer questions, with more time to study and a vested interest in getting an education. They believed girls to be more shy, reserved, and submissive, with less vested interest in schooling (with assumed vested interest in getting married and having children) and less time for study because of household chores, particularly in rural areas.

Surveying 100 science teachers (50 women and 50 men) in Zimbabwe, Chikunda (2010) reported that some teachers show some level of gender sensitivity and awareness in their expectations of students, monitoring of classroom dynamics, concern about sexist bias in language, and the need to encourage girls' participation and inform parents of the importance of science education for girls by highlighting women's contributions to science. However, a majority of teachers (70 percent) considered science to be factual, neutrally objective, and unaffected by people's background, culture, attitude, or gender, and could not identify the gender bias in science itself. Additionally, 60 percent of teachers did not adapt their teaching methods for different or preferred learning styles of girls and worked from the assumption that all children come to the classroom with equal experience. While 86 percent of teachers found it necessary to actively encourage girls, this belief also stems from stereotypical views of girls as passive, shy, and lacking confidence.

Ifegbesan's (2010) survey exploring the gender stereotypical beliefs of 250 secondary school teachers (52 percent women, 48 percent men) in Nigeria found the majority of teachers¹⁸ to be aware of gender issues and in agreement that a consideration of gender should be incorporated into teaching and learning practices but the majority of teachers agree with and accept gender stereotypes. Teachers agreed or strongly agreed about gender stereotypes in relation to statements such as "Men should be the head of the family" (79 percent) and "Men are better suited than women to work outside of the house" (62 percent). Yet 60 percent of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement, "Women's place is at home." Clearly, teacher beliefs about gender are complicated and sometimes contradictory.

In Benin, in 2003, the government launched a 3-year Equity and Quality in Primary Education (EQUIPE) training program designed to promote gender-equitable and girl-friendly

¹⁸ While this survey documented the sex of the respondents, explored the gender beliefs of teachers, and indicated significant differences based on the sex and age of the teachers, these differences were not considered in detail. The results are not sex-disaggregated, limiting the possibility for a more gender-sensitive analysis.



classrooms, focused on five areas: 1) learning styles and instructional interaction, 2) instructional support, 3) language patterns, 4) roles in the classroom, and 5) management of student time and space (Anderson, 2009). Evaluating the impacts of this training on teacher beliefs, Anderson's (2009) survey of 324 5th grade teachers indicated statistically significant disparities in teacher perceptions of their students' academic capabilities and performance, all favoring boys. For girls, teachers placed more importance on vocational studies that support women's traditional roles such as typing, cooking, and sewing as well as on learning advanced math, accounting, and French (perhaps reflecting teacher beliefs that girls under-performed in these subjects, as described below). For boys, teachers placed more importance on biology and chemistry. Teachers also had more positive opinions of girls in terms of non-academic qualities such as trustworthiness, cooperativeness, and being well-behaved. Teachers believe boys to be louder and more difficult to discipline.

Additionally, Anderson (2009) looked at the relationship between teacher beliefs and *how* teachers teach girls, with a focus on evaluating teachers' use of the child-centered and girl-friendly teaching methodologies learned during their training. Teachers' use of new methods depended on a combination of their belief in the importance of the subject for girls' education, as well as their belief about the academic performances of particular girls. Based on teachers' self-reporting, trends vary inversely:

- When subjects are believed to be *less important*, teachers are *more likely* to use child- and girl-friendly methodologies when girls are perceived as *high-performing*.
- When subjects are believed to be *more important*, teachers are *more likely* to use child- and girl-friendly methodologies when girls are perceived as *low-performing*. In other words, if girls are perceived as academically stronger, teachers may feel less urgency to use child- and girl-friendly strategies.

Ultimately, "as the opinion of performance begins to improve... the use of [child- and girl-friendly] strategies becomes less frequent" (p. 57) and lower perceptions of girls' performance means a higher variability of teaching methods.

Additionally, teachers with lower levels of professional certification reported being *more likely* to use child- and girl-friendly strategies—a relationship Anderson (2009) characterized as a conundrum for additional research and for teacher education programs to grapple with.

In the context of major efforts to expand formal schooling systems, particularly in order to provide universal basic education, how to prepare enough teachers with adequate teaching, literacy, and language skills remains a central challenge. It is widely acknowledged that the supply of qualified teachers often does not often meet the rapidly increasing demand, with low-income countries projected to need twice as many teachers by 2030 (Education Commission, 2016). A key challenge here is preparing enough qualified teachers to provide quality education. Reflecting specifically on primary teacher education in Nigeria, Adekola (2007) positions the development of teachers' language and communication skills as critical although often neglected components of teacher education. This is in particular in rural areas, where dominant or national languages—often the language of instruction—might be less widely spoken by both teachers and students. In this regard, Adekola recommended a modularized curriculum that better connects teacher learning with practice, with "greater hands on opportunities for teachers to become reflective practitioners rather than dispensers of received knowledge" (p. xiii), through a combination of short courses, as well as medium- and long-term strategies for teacher education. Critically, teachers must be better equipped to teach in multilingual contexts.



When these structural challenges are added to the need for a stronger gender component in teacher education, the need to connect gendered beliefs with pedagogical practice is even more significant for understanding the different ways in which gendered inequalities influence how teachers work with content and methods in their teaching practice. Thomas and Rugambwa's (2011, 2013) research with teachers in a secondary school in Tanzania found that teachers valued gender equality and were receptive to gender-responsive teaching. Teachers used a wide variety of classroom strategies to address gender, mostly from a quantitative perspective aimed at equal representation and opportunities to participate. As a result, teachers sometimes mixed girls and boys together for group work (despite how group dynamics do little to challenge dominant gender norms), intentionally called on boys and girls equally to answer questions (sometimes using punitive measures to encourage participation), and used gender-based competition to motivate student learning by pitting boys and girls against each other. However, the researchers found teacher attempts to address gender inconsistent and sometimes contradictory, conveying mixed messages. The authors recommended more support for teachers to address gender and power, and to promote more teacher reflexivity about how their own gender identities and positionalities can have an impact on student learning through intergenerational relations of power. It is critically important to better understand the role of teachers as agents of change, and the more positive and transformative aspects of social change.

Section Discussion

This section about teaching, learning, and literacy practices has covered two key areas. First, the section expands on traditional understandings of literacy as decoding skills and provides evidence about the important nuances and gendered differences in how young people engage with various forms of texts across different languages. From school-based reading and writing to broader considerations about the relationships between literacy and media, images, and online spaces, this scholarship offers important ways of understanding gender and literacy practices and developing more gender-responsive pedagogies for language, and literacy teaching and learning. The second key area is the acknowledgement of the limited amount of work that has been done in the area of gender, curriculum, and pedagogical practice regarding the actual content and methods of teaching and learning that occur in classrooms. An understanding of the gendered aspects of teacher education, teacher identity, teaching practice and instructional strategies indicates the need for further language and literacy research. All of this, of course, needs to be considered in the light of a gender analysis of teaching and learning materials.



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III) GENDER AND LEARNING MATERIALS

Question: How is gender taken up and addressed in teaching and learning materials?

1. Despite the identification of gender bias in textbooks several decades ago, this bias continues to be evident.

Section Overview

This section takes up the critical role of reading materials for literacy learning and addresses the quality of learning materials for addressing gender. Framing this section is “the dearth of reading materials in classrooms [in sub-Saharan Africa], especially in languages that are familiar to students” (RTI International, 2015a, p. 1), as well as for early grade reading. In this context, numerous book projects such as the African Storybook Initiative, the Children’s Book Project for Tanzania, the South African FunDza Literacy Trust, and the new Global Book Alliance aiming to develop, procure and distribute age-appropriate, culturally relevant reading materials offer important opportunities for addressing gender.

This section works with the following definitions from the UNESCO (2005) *Comprehensive Strategy for Textbooks and Learning Materials* (front matter):

Learning materials: Any form of media used to support a program of learning, often as supplements to the core text. Examples include workbooks, charts, educational games, audio and video tapes, posters and supplementary readers.

Textbooks: The core learning medium composed of text and/or images designed to bring about a specific set of educational outcomes; traditionally a printed and bound book including illustrations and instructions for facilitating sequences of learning activities.

Most of the literature reviewed reports on the perpetuation of gender bias specifically in textbooks. Smaller bodies of scholarship also explore other learning materials such as children’s books and young adult literature. This section also considers how learning materials are produced, and includes gender research about book chains and the publishing industry.

Textbooks

Given the unrivalled effectiveness and cost efficiency of textbooks as vital teaching aids, in particular in under-resourced environments (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009), it is not surprising that the majority of scholarship about gender in learning materials in Africa focuses specifically on textbooks. A strong body of literature from around the world has identified gender biases in textbooks. This work can be traced to second wave feminist scholarship and activism in the US documenting the stereotypical and under-representation of women and girls in textbooks in the early 1970s (Blumberg, 2007). These efforts were expanded globally during the UN Decade for



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Women (1976-1985), and through the corresponding UN (1979) policy, *Convention for Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*, through, for example, Article 10c:

The elimination of any stereotyped concept of the roles of men and women at all levels and in all forms of education by encouraging coeducation and other types of education which will help to achieve this aim and, in particular, by the revision of textbooks and school programmes and the adaptation of teaching methods.

UNESCO also published *Down With Stereotypes! Eliminating Sexism in Children's Literature and School Textbooks* (Michel, 1986).

Regarding the effectiveness of textbooks to address SDG #4 in general, a Global Education Monitoring Report policy paper on textbooks indicates that the majority of textbooks in the world “still fail to deal comprehensively, clearly and fairly with environmental issues and social justice concepts that are crucial for social cohesion, political stability and the future of the planet” (UNESCO, 2016c, p. 1), and highlights *the urgency for all governments to review and revise their textbooks*. Key findings of this review include the following: textbooks are increasingly taking up environmental issues as a global problem and students' power to act, although some textbooks continue to misrepresent environmental issues; global citizenship has minimal coverage, with textbooks continuing to focus on ideas about national citizenship; while textbooks increasingly emphasize the importance of human rights, many textbooks still fail to help students appreciate diversity (including the rights of immigrants and refugees, people with disabilities, LGBTQ communities, and ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic minorities); and textbooks that emphasize war and militarism risk fuelling conflict and violence.

While the *intensity* of sexism in learning materials has decreased, ongoing research problematizes how most textbooks continue to replicate gender inequality. As women's movements have increased globally, the coverage of gender themes, such as women's rights and contribution to society, discrimination and violence against women has increased but there is still a great deal of room for progress in most countries (UNESCO, 2016c). This need spans multiple and diverse contexts in the Global North and South (Blumberg, 2007). For example, research about history textbooks in the US indicates that women and, in particular, women of color are often less represented or represented in stereotypical ways that construct and normalize particular versions of history (Schmidt, 2012; Schocker & Woyshner, 2013). It is important to continue exploring not only of the place of girls and women in learning materials, but also to attend to the important and understudied questions of which particular women and girls might be included or excluded, and how. This means taking an intersectional approach that recognizes difference within the categories of *woman* and *girl*.

Evidence about gender bias in African textbooks was also established several decades ago. In Kenya, Anne Obura's (1991) groundbreaking work on the portrayal of women and girls across 24 textbooks, spanning 11 subject areas, found fewer images of female characters, the negative portrayal of women and girls in images as compared to the more striking, powerful, and positive images of men and boys. Almost fifteen years later, the International Network for Research into Gendered Representations in Textbooks (more commonly known by its French acronym, RIRRS *Réseau International de Recherche sur les Représentations Sexuées dans les Manuels Scolaires*) emerged from a series of UNESCO Gender and Textbooks seminars in Cameroon (2005), Togo (2006) and the DRC (2007). This established an important baseline for the work below. In this context, a number of studies have explored gender bias in African textbooks, a selection of which have been reviewed in this report (see Table 2).



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Table 2: Studies exploring gender representation in textbooks¹⁹

Author	Date	Context	# of texts	Level	Type
Yenika-Agbaw	2001	Cameroon	2	Primary	Language (English)
Buthelezi	2003	South Africa	6	Primary	Language (English, Afrikaans, IsiZulu)
Kobia	2009	Kenya	4	Primary	Language (English)
Brugeilles and Cromer	2009	Cameroon Cote d'Ivoire Togo Tunisia	24	Primary	Math
Foulds	2013	Kenya	16 images	Primary	Social studies
Bello, Yusuf, Amali, and Balogun	2014	Nigeria	Unspecified number of images	Primary	Social studies

In general, findings reveal that all textbooks assessed contained gender biases that perpetuate gender inequality in different ways. These biases are distinguished in a number of areas.

Frequency of characters

In terms of character frequency according to sex and age, textbooks have been assessed to contain:

- More boys and men than women and girls (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009);
- Very few women, such that adult role models in texts are predominantly male (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009);
- Decreasing numbers of female characters as the curriculum progresses to higher levels. This means that girls, while more present in earlier primary levels, tend to disappear progressively from texts (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; Kobia, 2009).

In his study of four Kenyan English language textbooks, Kobia (2009) found the frequency of female and male characters in images to be relatively gender-balanced in early primary, but by Class 8 only 37 percent of characters in images were female.

In the Bello, Yusuf, Amali, and Balogun (2014) study of the images in lower basic (primary) Nigerian Social Studies textbooks found more male characters, but with particularly high numbers of young boys (40 percent of all characters, as compared to girls, who represented 17 percent of all characters).

This trend can also be seen on the covers of textbooks. In four Nigerian English language textbooks, Kobia (2009) found that the number of girls represented on textbook covers decreased at higher levels. In Class 1, girls represented 4 of the 7 characters on the textbook cover but by Class 8, girls represented only 2 of the 9 characters.

Designations: Naming and status

The ways in which characters are named and accorded social status and power are also gendered. For example, one study found that men were more likely to be designated by their occupational status, and women by their family relationships (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). This

¹⁹ Note: Additional studies about gender and textbooks are presented in the Appendix C – Comprehensive Bibliography.



positioning models the belief that men's place is in the workplace and women's place is in the family. Further, Kobia (2009) found that when names were used, male names were used 60 percent of the time and when titles are used together, female titles come second thus designating secondary status to women (i.e. Mr. and Mrs.). This trend also extends to the representation of children. Bello et al. (2014) found boys are more likely to be portrayed with power and status as wealthy, middle or working class, while 85 percent of girls in textbooks were portrayed as poor.

Roles and activities

Earlier research documented the low representation and designated status of women in many textbooks, characterizing female characters as *invisible* because they seldom appear in texts and, when they do, they lack prominence (Buthelezi, 2003; Obura, 1991). More recent work takes up gender relations more broadly as a system that needs to look beyond the number of women portrayed in learning materials (Bello et al., 2014; Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009).

In terms of the roles and activities of adults, the findings generally reiterate how men and women are presented in stereotypical ways (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; Kobia, 2009).

- Men are more likely to be engaged in formal or informal occupational/productive or paid activities (engineers, pilots, judges, dentists, masons), with minimal involvement in housework. Additionally, Kobia (2009) found that men are more likely to be depicted as owners of higher property value such as land, livestock, and vehicles.
- Women are more likely to be portrayed in the domestic sphere, doing unpaid work or working in the informal economy (with some informal purchasing activities). When depicted in formal economic activities, women are typically presented in lower status positions such as teachers, secretaries, and farmers (Kobia, 2009).

Children are mostly portrayed doing school activities although math texts in Cameroon and Cote d'Ivoire tended to show more boys engaged in informal selling activities (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). Bello et al. (2014) also found stereotypical gendered distinctions in Nigerian Social Studies textbooks between girls' (domestic, unskilled, buying, caring) activities and boys' (social, occupational, vocational, professional) activities.

To exemplify these biases, Buthelezi's (2003) comparison of women's and men's roles and actions in six primary language textbooks in South Africa (three English, two Afrikaans, and one isiZulu) is summarized in the following Table 3 (not disaggregated by age):

Table 3: Example of gender bias in textbooks (compiled from Buthelezi, 2003)

Women and girls		Men and boys	
Social and professional role	Action	Social and professional role	Action
Old woman	Telling stories	Old man	Singing
Grandmother	Cooking	Police	Speaking
Mother	Baking	Learner	Interviewing
Wife	Holding a baby	Principal	Researching
Teacher	Sitting and listening	Doctor	Doing experiments
Nurse	Watching others	Inventor	Presenting a book
Learner	Cleaning	Fire fighter	Thinking
Singer	Fetching water and	Soccer player	Watching others
Public relations officer	firewood	Builder	Running
Bank teller	Playing netball	Artist	Playing basketball
	Skipping rope	Uncle	Reading a newspaper



Beautiful lady Patient	Serving tea Giving medicine Buying necklace Knitting Chatting with others Lonely, shy, excited, sad Helping injured people Talking to people Washing clothes Riding a bicycle Buying Selling produce Speaking Studying at night Reading stories	Ticket officer Tractor driver Taxi driver Bus driver Grandfather Cyclist Criminal Thief Business owner Salesperson Business manager Human resource manager Financial manager General manager Radio broadcaster Father Shopkeeper Mechanic	Painting Listening to the radio Making tea Selling tickets Driving tractor, taxi, bus Providing Stealing diamonds Catching thieves Escaping from thieves Controlling emotions Sad, angry, happy, frightened Writing Making a telephone call using a landline and a cellphone Sitting in front of a computer Employing people Broadcasting Watering the garden Raking leaves Marketing Taking photos Working in the garden Doing the washing Fixing cars Playing soccer and cricket
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This analysis shows how male and female characters are presented performing stereotypical roles and activities. Also, men and boys are presented in much more diverse ways, engaged in higher numbers of roles and activities. Women are presented in more restricted and limited ways, as is their work. In an analysis of textbooks that do attempt to broaden women's roles, Foulds (2013) observed the need for more careful use of different visual modes. For example, Foulds identified the use of photographs to depict women's traditional roles, such as working on a farm or in a market, whereas drawings of women in gender transformative roles, such as police officers and pilots were used. Certainly, this reflects the lack of photographs of women in gender transformative roles. However, this also constructs a dichotomy that risks reinforcing women's 'real' (photographed, traditional) and 'invented' (illustrated, gender-transformative) roles.

Attributes: Personality traits, behaviors, and interactions

Research shows that gendered representations rely strongly on gender stereotypes that reinscribe a gender binary not only in terms of status and activity, but also in terms of personality traits, behaviors, and moral character. In Yenika-Agbaw's (2001) study of two primary English textbooks in Cameroon, she identified examples of how girls are portrayed as undeserving of attention (whereas boys are deserving), unintelligent, deficient or apologetic (whereas boys are clever and special), scared and needing to be rescued and protected (by courageous men or boys), living in rural areas and socializing with smaller groups at home (whereas boys are urban and well-connected in their communities) and, finally, that women must be sacrificial and accept hardship. In Kobia's (2009) study of images in English textbooks in Nigeria, male characters were often more likely to be portrayed with positive personality traits such as being studious, ambitious, hardworking, creative, and knowledgeable. Women were more likely to be portrayed



as having more nurturing traits (such as being welcoming, caring, careful, dutiful, polite, and courteous) as well as with negative personality traits (like being careless or indecisive). This positioned men as more likely to be leaders, and women as needing to be led.

However, even gender-transformative images have uncertain impact. In Kenya, Foulds (2013) studied primary school children's first impressions of gender in grade-specific images from textbooks, and found that children often interpret images according to dominant norms in their social context. Thus, when the images were incongruous with students' daily experiences, students often misinterpreted images (such as one of a woman pilot) that were intended to be gender transformative. Foulds cautioned that this disconnect "creates an impasse that fails to critique or improve gender roles" (p. 166). This emphasizes the need for strong gender- and child-friendly pedagogical practices to complement the work being done with reading materials.

Language

Many of the above-mentioned scholars note how the textbooks they analyzed use gender-inclusive, neutral, and sensitive language (Buthelezi, 2003; Foulds, 2013; Kobia, 2009). However, given how this is inconsistent with the findings above, the extent of this analysis is unclear and refers, perhaps, to changes in the generic use of male pronouns to refer to the population in general. For example, Foulds (2013) found contradictions between image content and gender-neutral language. Despite the use of the gender-neutral language in an image caption (i.e. 'We use water to wash our clothes'), the image portrays a woman doing laundry, thus reinforcing gender stereotypes. Buthelezi (2003), noted, "While the gender-sensitive language of 'he or she' is used in the books, and the pictures mostly represent males and females side-by-side, addressing issues of gender bias goes far beyond [placing] 'he or she' (whether in words or pictures) next to each other" (p. 39).

Research about gender representation in textbooks points to an overall depiction of a masculine world, (perhaps) inadvertently sending the message that boys and men are more important. Given the central role of textbooks both as the primary learning material in many classrooms, as well as in social and cultural production more generally, the gender biases are considered detrimental to the learning of both girls and boys (and teaching practices more generally) in relation to broader goals of gender equality. Bruegilles and Cromer (2009) offer the following conclusion:

Textbooks standardize, reinforce and legitimize gender inequality. They convey the idea that girls' education is not as important as boys' education. This idea is likely to be assimilated not only by the pupils but also by the teaching profession and parents, who will not necessarily view it critically. (p. 40)

The aforementioned studies also stress the importance of combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches that assess images, written text, and the relationship between them.

Supplementary Reading Materials and Children's Literature

In the area of children's literature, this review distinguishes between children's storybooks (most likely to be applicable in the context of primary education), and young adult literature (most likely taken up in the context of secondary education). Meena Khorana's (1998) edited collection that adopts a postcolonial perspective on African children's and young adult literature, began to address the portrayal of women and girls. Khorana provided examples of



children's literature that champions women's rights.²⁰ Khorana also noted how many novels align women's subjugated positions and struggles for equality alongside the oppression of Africa and struggles for independence. Odaga (1998) also explained in this collection how oral narratives tend to portray women as either evil or nurturing. Odaga explained, "The images of girls and women in locally published books is gradually changing, although negative beliefs and attitudes survive in oral tales and fiction" (p. 23). These portrayals reinforce problematic dichotomies, constructing limited space for girls' and women's multiple and diverse subjectivities.

Children's storybooks

Gender and representation in children's storybooks in the context of Africa is understudied. Although many exciting initiatives work to develop culturally responsive and appropriate storybooks for children such as the Children's Book Project in Tanzania and the African Storybook Project, there is a need to examine representation in these texts using a gender perspective. Rich scholarship exploring gender in children's storybooks in other contexts offers insightful background and theoretical framing. For example, research in the US has explored gender roles in Caldecott award-winning children's literature (Crabb & Bielawski, 2011) and in non-award-winning so called easy-to-read books (Poarch & Monk-Turner, 2001), as well as gender bias in children's recall of storybooks (Frawley, 2008). Additionally, the gender-sensitive approaches and resources listed above for textbooks offer a helpful place to begin.

Young adult literature

Young adult literature plays an important role in tackling critical social issues such as sexual health, HIV and AIDS, eating disorders, and inequalities in relation to education for girls and boys, and the need for girls to be strategic to get what they can to achieve their goals. The importance of young adult literature has been taken up by several authors in South Africa as can be seen in the work of Mitchell and Smith (1996a, 1996b), Smith and Mitchell (2001), and Flockemann (2005). Ann Smith's (2000) work on the realist novel *Nervous Conditions* by Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga explores the possibility of using a novel as a site of research into and as an opportunity for action on the inequities of education in Africa and as such offers an example of what Smith terms feminism-in-action. Young adult sexuality and responsibility is the focus of *Babes, Boys and Deep Deep Trouble* by Judy Norton. In this novel, a teacher assigns *Nervous Conditions* as a text to be read at a girls' school in Zimbabwe (Mitchell & Smith, 1996a). The potential of a novel like *Nervous Conditions* to evoke discussion about girls' empowerment was also explored, on the advice of Claudia Mitchell, with beginning teachers at a teachers' college in Zambia as part of the Ministry of Education's Programme for the Advancement of Girls' Education (Mitchell, Blaeser, Chilangwa, & Maimbolwa-Sinyangwe, 1999).

At the same time, Mitchell and Smith (2003) explored the ways in which youth-produced literature can also become central to contributing to literacy practices in relation to girls' empowerment. A volume of poetry and narratives, *In My Life: Youth Stories and Poems on HIV/AIDS*, produced by young people for young people and published by a local Cape Town

²⁰ For example children's literature by Teresa Meniru (Nigeria), supplementary school readers by Onuoru Nzekwu (Nigeria) and Michael Crowder (UK), and the oral literature writing of Asenath Odaga (Kenya).



(South Africa) publisher serves as an example of literacy being used as a way of addressing social change in areas such as gender and HIV and AIDS (Mitchell, 2006).

Several scholars examine the use of particular stories in classroom environments to address gender in the learning process. In the context of secondary schooling in South Africa, Robert Balfour (2003) introduced three short stories depicting different cultures in South Africa and depicting different time periods, places and cultural contexts.²¹ This approach incorporates African literature in important ways. The texts reflect variations on the local context, effective and relevant in ways to which students can relate, but that also offer situations somewhat removed from students' own lives to allow space for critical assessment of dominant cultural norms. The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) manual, *Gender Sensitive-Editing* (Sifuniso et al., 2000) draws on examples from Kenyan texts, including gender-progressive texts such as a book of poems about women and girls published in 1998, and texts that reinscribe gender stereotypes such as newspaper articles, textbooks, songs in Kiswahili and a children's magazine, *Rainbow*.

However, few studies take up a gender analysis of the texts themselves. This might relate to a lack of books, or lack of research about what texts, other than textbooks, young people are reading. One exception is the study by Lundgren and Khau (2015) that takes up a gender analysis of the novel, *Broken Promises* by Ros Haden, part of the Harmony Series published by FunDza. As part of a larger study at secondary schools in South Africa's Eastern Cape, this research found that students really like *Broken Promises*, which is distributed free at partner schools. Lundgren and Khau concluded that this popular book affirmed gender stereotypes about masculinity—men are powerful, providers who dominate—and femininity in that women are defined in relation to men and to their appearance. Certainly, other interpretations of this novel are possible, particularly in light of a recent FunDza Literacy Trust human rights project, which aims to shift reader attitudes about gender.²²

Thomas and Rugambwa (2011) also examined the story, *Hawa, the Bus Driver* by Richard Mabala, a mandatory national text taught in O-level English courses in Tanzania. This text subverts gender stereotypes about women's roles in society by centering a female bus driver who successfully overcomes many obstacles. However, Thomas and Rugambwa expressed concern that the book also reinforces gender norms because Hawa's biggest challenge is her husband who is jealous of her success and maintains the final say over whether Hawa is permitted to continue her job. Ann Smith noted that it is also possible to read Hawa's husband's decision to allow her to continue driving the bus as an ironic comment on masculinity given that Hawa's friends trick him into recognizing how brave and capable she is (personal communication, 2017). The point is that there are multiple possible readings of every text. Gender analysis requires readers to be able to identify dominant discourses portrayed in the text and the intentions of the author.

In the development of culturally appropriate gender-responsive teaching and learning materials and pedagogies, it is important to draw on diversity, and to demonstrate realistic and meaningful examples of how difference already exists within particular local contexts, and acknowledge the complexity of particular identity categories. The danger is the construction of homogenizing categories of girl, boy, woman, and man and characteristics that limit diverse

²¹ Myriam Tlali's *Fud-u-u-a!!*; Ahmed Essop's *Violence*; and Pauline Smith's *The Sisters*.

²² <http://www.fundza.co.za/our-rights-matter/>



ways of being. It is important for teaching and learning materials and pedagogies to find ways to recognize the complexities related to social identity, agency, and power.

Early grade reading materials in African languages

The RTI International (2015a) *Survey of Children's Reading Materials in African Languages in Eleven Countries*²³ is the first study of this kind. This review presents an overview of reading materials in African languages specific to early grade reading (EGR), in the context of challenging access to reliable data about the African book sector, and the need for inventories of existing titles. This survey included textbooks, supplementary readers, and other materials such as manuals and dictionaries. It explored the availability of titles, the usefulness of these titles for reading development, the feasibility of using, adapting and reproducing these titles, and the general landscape of EGR materials development including the market dynamics and policy landscape regarding language in education. Survey results indicate a shortage of titles in African languages. While titles in 200 different African languages were located, many languages have limited titles (40 languages have only 1 title each).

As part of the survey, representations of gender, ethnicity, religion, and persons with disabilities were assessed and the report concluded that there is limited representational bias based on gender, ethnicity or religion. The report stated that “in most cases, the genders were judged to be portrayed equally” (p. 38) and “for the overwhelming majority of titles, the data collectors judged that there was an insufficient basis for comparison of the nature of the portrayal, if any, of ethnic or religious groups in the illustrations” (p. 38). These findings are surprising and inconsistent with the research reviewed above that suggests overwhelmingly that gender bias persists across many reading materials. It should be noted that the survey findings were prefaced with a statement about the methodological challenges of assessing the more qualitative aspects of representational bias (see p. 37). Whereas the frequency of representation is relatively straightforward, individual subjectivity plays a more complicated role in the evaluation of questions about social equality. Here, the positionality of the data collectors and their familiarity with gender analysis and a social justice framework are unclear. This suggests the need for more research about why these findings contradict previous research.

Puberty Readers

The recent development of the genre of Puberty Readers provides an exciting model to use to increase culturally appropriate tools for literacy, awareness, and puberty education. Marni Sommer's (2009, 2010) pioneering work developing *The Girls' Puberty Book Project* in Tanzania filled a critical need expressed by the girls in the study above. This project launched a Puberty Reader series, *Growth and Changes*, of gender-specific books for young people between 10 and 14 years of age. This initiative is organized through the non-profit organization, Grow and Know.²⁴ Blake, Boone, Kassa, and Sommer (2017) reported on this series:

Each puberty book presents scientifically accurate information on the physiological changes of puberty integrated with tailored, culturally appropriate framing and stories. In each country, the book development process includes qualitative research conducted with adolescent girls (or, boys, in the case of boy-

²³ Countries include the DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia.

²⁴ www.growandknow.org



specific books) and the adults in their lives. This research includes space for girls to describe their own experiences with puberty and MHM, and the stories collected in this process serve as the basis for those included in the final books. All Growth and Changes books incorporate input from local stakeholders, and engage local translators, illustrators, and publishing companies to ensure cultural appropriateness. Draft versions of each book are field tested with girls (of similar age and grade as intended audience), parents, and teachers for appropriateness, relevance, and match with literacy levels. The final versions of the books in each country (Tanzania, Ghana, Ethiopia, Cambodia, and Madagascar) have been approved by the respective countries' Ministries of Education for distribution in primary schools and in some countries, lower secondary schools. (p. 6)

This growing interest in and uptake of Puberty Readers presents important opportunities for further development. In UNESCO's (2014b) booklet *Puberty Education & Menstrual Hygiene Management*, Puberty Readers are positioned as one example of how to work with and complement existing school curricula within a comprehensive approach to sexuality and puberty education. Additional Puberty Readers, such as the Ghana Book Trust's *Red Letter Day* and *Dora is Growing Up*, also show positive reception and promise (CODE, 2017).

With the scaling up of Puberty Reader production and distribution, Blake et al. (2017) evaluated the impact of a simple distribution of the Ethiopian version of the Puberty Reader (in other words, the book was distributed to girls but not combined with any teaching or learning activities). This pilot evaluation assessed the menstruation knowledge and attitudes of over 600 girls, aged between 10 and 19, in Grades 6 and 7 from rural schools, before and after receiving a copy of the book. The results of this study suggest statistically significant improvements in girls' knowledge about menstruation and an overwhelmingly positive qualitative response to the book. Additional research might further examine the book development process, the short- and long-term impact of Puberty Readers on girls' and boys' literacy practices, access to schooling, and overall wellbeing, and how gender-specific or gender-inclusive audiences affect the development and uptake of the books. As Blake et al. (2017) noted, the individual impacts of Puberty Readers need also to be explored in relation to the interpersonal, institutional, community, and policy-level factors that influence MHM.

The development and use of Puberty Readers connects with the next section of this review, Emerging Literacies for Social Change, and the need to address comprehensive sexuality education, and as well contributing to a whole-school approach to gender and literacy, particularly in the area of MHM, as discussed in the last section, A Gender-Responsive, Whole-School Approach. From the perspective of gender and learning materials, Puberty Readers offer important opportunities to explore the relationship between literacies and gender empowerment. Critically, Puberty Readers bring together questions about literacy and health, bridging the education and health sectors. There is the need for more scholarly inquiry about the use, impact, and potential of Puberty Readers.

Materials Development and the Publishing Industry

To address gender representations in learning materials such as textbooks, as well as in children's books and young adult literature, research points to the need for more concerted attention to gender in book development processes. For example, in the development of the Kenyan series, *Let's Learn English* published by the Kenya Literature Bureau, Kobia (2009)



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found women to be under-represented across all stages in the production process, as summarized in Table 4:

Table 4: Gender representation in the Kenyan *Let's Learn English* series (from Kobia, 2009)

	Authors	Editors	Artists	Photographers	Designers	Total
Men	10	4	5	2	3	24
Women	4	0	0	0	1	5

Given the widespread use and centrality of textbooks in educational systems, textbooks are positioned as important levers, or mediators of change (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). In many contexts and communities, school textbooks might be the only books that are widely available for students, but also for teachers and the wider community. To address gender representation in textbooks, but also in different types of teaching and learning materials, the following recommendations have been made:

- Understand the different phases, actors and processes of influence in textbook chains. Gender awareness is critical at each phase, but given how these processes and actors differ in different national contexts, this process must be understood before the most effective area for intervention can be identified (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009);
- Develop strong and clear policy and establish rigorous gender-sensitive criteria (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009);
- Develop a more gender-inclusive curriculum (Kobia, 2009);
- Conduct training seminars for classroom teachers about gender issues in textbook representation (Kobia, 2009);
- Provide publishers with comprehensive assessment checklists and evaluation guidelines in relation to the curriculum requirements (Kobia, 2009);
- Conduct more regular, in-house gender training in publishing houses (Kobia, 2009); and
- Interrogate the role of funding organizations such as the World Bank and the Ford Foundation as an area for intervention (Blumberg, 2007).

Manuals for developing gender-sensitive materials

The following methodological guides offer excellent tools and worksheets for assessing and addressing gender bias in textbooks and learning materials. Each guide draws explicitly on examples of action and experience in Africa.

Brugeilles, C., & Cromer, S. (2009). *Promoting gender equality through textbooks: A methodological guide*. Paris: UNESCO.

RTI International. (2015c). *A guide for strengthening gender equality and inclusiveness in teaching and learning materials*. Washington, D.C.: USAID.

Sifuniso, M., Kasonde, C., Kimani, E. N., Maimbolwa-Sinyangwe, I., Kimani, W., & Nalumango, M. (2000). *Gender-sensitive editing*. Oxford: ADEA Working Group on Books and Learning Materials.

The RTI International guide also takes up explicitly the representation of disability, an intersection often lacking in much of the gender literature. It is worth noting that several UNESCO guides and strategies for textbook production (such as the 2005 *Comprehensive Strategy for Textbooks and Learning Materials*, and Pingel's (2010) *Guidebook on Textbook Research and Textbook Revision*) do not include substantive gender sections.



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Section Discussion

In many ways, gender bias in learning materials has been on the feminist agenda for several decades. However, work in this area remains limited, particularly in African contexts. Regarding textbooks, scholarly evidence about gender bias suggests the need for stronger attention to gender representation in the following areas: the frequency of characters; how characters are designated by name and status; the roles and activities in which characters are engaged; the personality traits, behaviors, and interactions of different characters; and language. Two important manuals (see Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009; RTI International, 2015c) provide guidelines, with specific instructions on how to produce more gender balanced and less stereotypical gender representations in textbooks and learning materials.

At the same time, there is a need to interrogate more deeply and from a contextualized perspective, the gendered dimensions and politics of how textbooks are produced. Certainly, textbooks are changing and publishers are making more concerted efforts to eliminate gender bias and stereotypical representations. Some textbooks explicitly include units about bias and prejudice textbooks, for example in the *Via Afrika English First Additional Language: Grade 11 Learner's Book* (Damons, Maseko, Msibi, & Smith, 2012). However, there is little research about this process. Who is involved at different stages of textbook production? What processes influence the decisions regarding gender representation in textbooks? How do governments and education ministries establish and prioritize gender and literacy criteria in the textbook selection or commissioning process? How does the publishing industry negotiate gender representations in texts? How might case studies from different governments or publishing houses help establish what has worked and the types of issues and debates that emerge? Further, in the context of the increasing popularity of book projects that specifically develop culturally and linguistically responsive reading materials for young people living in different contexts in Africa, this suggests exciting opportunities to study also the development and use of these storybooks from a gender perspective. Examining materials development more broadly, what is the relationship between educational reform and materials development? How do curricular changes and various different book projects affect the priorities of the publishing industry?

IV) EMERGING LITERACIES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Question: In expanded definitions of literacy, how might sexual health literacies contribute to the empowerment of girls?

1. Comprehensive sexuality education is a critical site for addressing social norms related to gender and sexuality. More research is needed into the ways in which health and sexual literacies relate to reading and writing practices, and to empowerment.
2. Teachers play a central role in the design and implementation of critical pedagogies that address rather than reinforce dominant gender norms and power. Teachers can therefore be key agents of change in classrooms.
3. Participatory and learner-centered pedagogies such as peer education and participatory visual methodologies show much promise in this area.

Section Overview

While the previous sections have focused primarily on well-established areas of literacy, ranging from conventional notions of reading and writing to work on new literacies (multiliteracies, multimodality, and digital literacies), this section highlights the ways in which sexual health literacies are, of necessity, becoming central to the survival and empowerment for young people on the African continent. This work has critical implications for curriculum and pedagogy and for teacher education more broadly, and, as can be seen in the previous section, on the choice of texts in literacy classrooms.

Comprehensive Sexuality, Relationship Education, and Sexual Health Literacy

Central to realizing Sustainable Development Goal #5 regarding gender equality is access to sexual and reproductive health information for girls and young women. Sexual health education can support girls in delaying sexual debut, choosing lower-risk partners, and better protecting themselves during sex. Sexual health literacy can be regarded as a type of empowerment, particularly in relation to addressing unequal power relations. Literature about girls' education and empowerment identifies the central role of comprehensive sexuality and relationship education in addressing gender norms and power, in particular as they relate to sex and sexuality. This is critical to addressing GBV given how girls are disproportionately affected by HIV and AIDS. In sub-Saharan Africa, the region most heavily affected by HIV infection, three in four newly infected adolescents aged between 15 and 19 are girls (UNICEF, 2016). The UNFPA (2016) recommends beginning comprehensive sexuality education by age 10 in primary school, and stresses that this is particularly important between the ages of 10 and 14 as young people go through puberty (UNFPA, 2016). UNESCO (2014b) recommended integrating age-appropriate puberty education much earlier: "Puberty should not be taught in isolation, rather it should be delivered through an age and developmentally appropriate skills-based health education curriculum framework that starts as early as age five and continues into young adulthood" (p. 7). With these recommendations, much research contextualizes challenges such as the strong condemnation of sex before marriage and the taboo nature of discussions about safer sex practices, contraceptives, pregnancy, abortion, and teen parenthood, as well as about sex in general. Working *with* communities, schools, and religious institutions to both develop sexual



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health education that is both culturally appropriate but that also challenges entrenched stereotypes about gender and sexuality is essential.

Access to family planning and reproductive health information

Without a formal sexual health curriculum, Jones and Norton (2007) found that girls in Uganda have limited sources of formal and informal sexual health information. Most teachers paid only cursory attention to sexual health education. When sexual health is addressed, a key message is often to encourage abstinence, despite how many young people are already sexually active. Sexual health education needs to address the discrepancies between what young people know and do (regarding condom use for example). Girls were relatively confident about their knowledge of sexual health but feared early/unplanned pregnancy (and being expelled from school) more than contracting HIV. Sexual health literacy must consider context and intersecting economic and gendered constraints; program development must involve those most affected. Also in Uganda, Norton and Mutonyi (2010) developed a seminar for secondary students in which students read and responded to research articles about HIV. This provided students with the opportunity to grapple with and speak back to health research that relates to their lives. This study found what is known as languaging—turning ideas into language in order to make them available, to contest meaning or solve problems—plays a critical role in how youth address gender issues in sexual health education.

Since the national gender machinery has an impact on sexual and reproductive health changes, it is critical that girls, women, and their communities have access to information about these changes. For example, in Ethiopia, revisions in 2005 to the Criminal Code legalized abortion (Alemu, 2010). Yet in this study of girls' access to abortion, many girls and women were unaware of the new legislation, and did not know where to access safe and affordable abortion services. Many were surprised that they did not hear the changes announced in the media or by the government. Interviews with 11 girls (aged 14 to 17) who had had an abortion found that most girls used self-induced or traditional abortion procedures, and felt conflicted—both ashamed and guilty that they had committed a sin or a crime, but at the same time relieved about not having a child and being able to continue their education. At the time of this research, Marie Stopes International Ethiopia was the only provider of medical abortions in Ethiopia, where Alemu observed most clients to be teens and unmarried women. This study recommended better awareness and education campaigns about abortion, contraceptives, and sexuality more generally, in particular amongst government health professionals, community-based reproductive health workers, teachers, and religious leaders.

Beyond the ABCs

In the design of sexual health education initiatives, research asserts the need to move beyond campaign approaches that provide age appropriate information and ABC messaging (abstinence, be faithful, and condomize). While access to information, and discussions about abstinence, condom use and the implications of having multiple partners are critical starting points, it is well documented that these strategies alone are not enough to transform the sexual behaviors and experiences of young people. Critically, much research substantiates that increased awareness about contraceptives does not necessarily increase the use of contraceptives (see Alemu, 2010). Additionally, researchers have identified that young people sometimes feel bombarded with negative and didactic messaging in relation to sex, HIV and AIDS in class as well as in the media, leading to what is known as AIDS fatigue characterized by students being



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no longer receptive (Chege, 2006). Over a decade ago, Mitchell and Smith (2003) described young people in South Africa as being “sick of AIDS,” prompting the need for new and different types of models for sexual health education that strive for deeper engagement with the critical issues facing communities. For example, in Uganda, Mutonyi and Kendrick (2011) used cartooning to explore what students know and understand about HIV and AIDS, and how they represent it in relation to public health campaigns. Participants produced multimodal texts depicting issues such as multiple sexual relationships/networks, sexual assault, condom use, and abstinence. These texts allowed both graphic and metaphorical representations that transcended cultural taboos and provided space in which to elaborate on emotions such as fear and sadness. At the same time, cartooning permitted representations of girls and women that challenge dominant ideas about sexual agency.

Space to talk about sex, gender, and sexuality

This points to the need for more comprehensive approaches to sex health. Education needs to address a broader range of sexual health information, topics, and skills in ways that include discussion about self-esteem and intimate relationships, sexual agency, and decision-making, gender norms, rights, risk and stigma, and power dynamics.

SRGBV interventions frequently aim to empower girls, but this is often understood narrowly in terms of achieving rights to education and freedom from violence, without considering sexual agency or bodily integrity. An emphasis on empowering girls to make decisions about their bodies and lives combined with an understanding of norms which constrain that choice, is crucial for work on SRGBV. (Heslop, 2016, p. 6)

Drawing on a UNICEF-funded study with young people across Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, Pattman and Chege (2003) reported the dire need for more *open* discussion about gender, sex, and sexuality. Working in a heteronormative framework, this study identified three key strategies for work in this area.

1) *Open discussion* in spaces in which young people are considered experts in their own lives, and can be heard in holistic, non-authoritarian, and non-judgmental ways. Pattman and Chege (2003) found that traditional approaches to HIV and AIDs education (from teachers and family members) promoted moralistic messaging that shuns pre-marital sex (despite the fact that most young people were already sexually active) and that characterizes sex as bad, risky, and dangerous with a focus on its negative consequences. The researchers found that when given the opportunity, young people in all the research contexts were quite open, frank, and willing to discuss their ideas, beliefs, and experiences about sex. Many participants noted that their participation in the study was the first time they had ever had the opportunity to speak openly about sex. Open discussion is important in breaking down girls’ and boys’ investments in stereotypical and gender polarized identities (Pattman & Chege, 2003) as well as allowing them to talk about the positive aspects and enjoyment related to intimate relationships and sex (Chege, 2006).

2) *Multiple identities*: Young people need a space in which to express different and contradictory voices, identities, and positions about how they negotiate their sexual and gender beliefs and experiences. Pattman and Chege’s (2003) found discrepancies between how young people speak and write about their experiences, anxieties, pleasures, and desires across different modes of communication such as in mixed-sex discussion groups and personal diaries. For one, boys and girls performed gender quite differently in mixed group interviews. The boys enacted



louder and more assertive and sexualized identities by dominating conversations with boastful sexual comments and often insulting girls with personal and misogynistic comments. The girls tended to present quieter, more shy, and asexual identities and were visibly uncomfortable and easily silenced. These performances reflect dominant gendered norms about sexuality.

However, in personal diaries, boys spoke quite differently; they used more intimate, romantic, and emotional language about their relationships with girls. While girls said very little in the group interviews, they wrote extensively in their diaries about their relationships and desire. The double standards regulating the sexuality of girls need to be more significantly addressed. On the one hand, girls' sexual agency is regulated and restricted; there is little space for girls to speak openly about their sexual desire, for risk of being labeled negatively. On the other, girls' sexual agency needs to be valued as having a central role in negotiating safer sex. Pattman and Chege (2003) noted, "Precisely because girls are not supposed to express sexual desire in the same way that boys do, this leaves them open to the accusation, even if they report sexual harassment that really they 'encouraged' or 'sent a signal'" (p. 108).

HIV/AIDS education needs, then, to encourage boys and girls to talk about themselves and each other in ways which do not affirm and reproduce these stereotypes, but which help them to identify with each other and see things from the other's point of view. The aim must be to help young people think of the opposite sex as less opposite and as more like them, as people with whom they can be friends as well as boyfriends/girlfriends in a trusting and safe manner. (Pattman & Chege, 2003, p. 111)

Sexuality education needs to avoid moralistic approaches to sexuality that

...conflict with the ways [young people] construct their identities and their behavior in other contexts, for example with their friends and outside school.

HIV/AIDS/life skills education must not contribute to this splitting of identities, but should aim to address and encourage young people to talk about their sexual feelings, desires and concerns. (Pattman & Chege, 2003, p. 106)

3) *Group work*: Pattman and Chege (2003) recommended using both single and mixed-sex groups. In Stage 1, same-sex groups identify and discuss the problems they face, as well as the problems they think the opposite sex face. In Stage 2, mixed groups discuss their findings.

Teaching and Teacher Education

A key component of addressing Emerging Literacies for Social Change relates to recognizing the challenges that teachers face in classrooms that are meant to be transformative. Teachers, for example, often do not feel prepared to discuss sex. Research suggested that when students position teachers at the center of sexuality discourse, teachers felt embarrassed, vulnerable, and worried about being "expected to provide personal testimonies of their sex life" (Chege, 2006, p. 37). As a result, teachers were found to prefer didactic question-answer formats, and "adopted moralistic and authoritarian approaches that helped them to assert their authority and protect themselves from ridicule" (Pattman & Chege, 2003, p. 105). When teachers did use more participatory and democratic forms of teaching, students become more comfortable and asked pointed questions about, for example, how female condoms feel and whether or not the withdrawal method of contraception works. Teachers, in turn, then found this embarrassing and were often unprepared, feeling ambushed and lacking control of the conversation. Teachers were uncomfortable with the role reversal in the classroom.



These findings suggest the need to move beyond thinking about sexual health education as lessons about *sex* and “for teachers to learn to treat HIV and AIDS education, not as something to be ‘passed on’ or ‘transmitted’ to the learners, but rather as an educational and social discourse to be interrogated freely and discursively” (Chege, 2006, p. 40).

Teachers should not focus exclusively on sex, but rather on how the learners see themselves as particular girls and boys and the significance they attach to sex in defining themselves in relation to others. Training teachers in participatory pedagogic skills should be a key component for both the in-service as well as pre-service teachers for all subjects, including sexuality and HIV/AIDS education. (Chege, 2006, p. 41)

Safe spaces? Teacher violence and violent pedagogies

At the same time that teachers can be “heroes” as agents of change in their classrooms, they can also be “villains” as Clarke (2008, p. 17) observed. While Clarke is commenting specifically on this dual role that teachers might play in responding to HIV and AIDS, these terms can also refer to teachers as potential perpetrators of violence. In relation to safe spaces, Heslop (2016) wrote,

It is common to observe that these safe spaces are compromised in some way, through didactic teaching, moralizing approaches, and unmanaged power dynamics within groups or external interruptions from untrusted groups. Whether and how teachers can create these safe spaces is a critical question that needs further study, as most evidence is drawn from community-based interventions. Education and teacher training systems in many contexts may not be conducive to the development of safe spaces - whether they are inside the classroom, such as in sex and relationships education, or outside, such as in girls’ clubs. Effective work in training teachers to teach children about sexual violence has found it necessary to work first with teachers on their own personal experiences and histories of violence in order to construct non-violent teaching approaches. Similarly, deep-rooted ideas and experiences of gender need to be unpacked in order for teachers or other facilitators to be able to lead gender transformative learning (p. 8).

Drawing on qualitative research with students and teachers from seven countries²⁵ across Eastern and Southern Africa, Chege (2006) explored how teachers constructed their own gender and sexual identities, as well as those of their students through classroom practices. In FGDs with teachers, male teachers dominated the discussions and interrupted women teachers, justifying African masculinities as critical custodians of African culture (Chege, 2006). In this study, how male teachers constructed their sexual identities contradicted their gendered moralistic attitudes towards sex. While male teachers discouraged girls from having sexual relations with boys, the teachers themselves sought sexual relations with girls. This had implications for girls (see below) but also for boys. Chege (2006) wrote, “The fact that male teachers made it difficult for boys to befriend the girls had an emasculating effect on the boys” (p. 37). Most students (boys and girls) found female teachers to be more receptive than male teachers, and better listeners with better advice.

The prevalence of sexual relationships between students and teachers has received attention in the literature. It is well documented that male teachers sometimes provide girls with

²⁵ Botswana, Kenya, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.



gifts (mobile phones, phone credit), money, better grades or rides in exchange for sex in sugar daddy relationships. With concerns about coercion and imbalances of power in such relationships, many scholars have investigated the complicated relationships between poverty, transactional sex, and girls' sexual agency. For example, Jones and Norton (2007) found that some secondary school girls in Uganda were afraid of the consequences of refusing sexual advances from their teachers, while other girls expected gifts in return for sex with their teachers. At a secondary school in Tanzania, Thomas and Rugambwa (2011) found unintended consequences of a school policy that forbade intimate relationships between students. As a result of this regulation, boys and girls created distance between themselves and tended to avoid each other socially for fear of being accused by their teachers of being in a relationship. However, the relationships between male teachers and female students were not questioned and held up to the same scrutiny. Many male teachers believed that female students needed interactions with men because they were lacking interactions with boys.

All of this points to the need for a stronger gender component in teacher education. A gender-responsive approach to teacher education includes:

1. Training in-service and prospective teachers on gender, human rights, and GBV is central to positively influencing the teachers' own understandings and attitudes about gender.
2. A gendered approach to teacher education must also include classroom experience in using gender equitable teaching strategies.
3. A national policy with resources and structures for ongoing professional development for gender-equitable teaching and learning is required to make a difference over time.

One or two gender trainings are not enough. (Miske, 2013, p. 18)

In addition, all teachers should be trained in counseling and mentoring (Parkes & Heslop, 2013), as well as in classroom management and positive discipline approaches. Governments need to increase budget allocations for teacher education (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008). In-service training provides ongoing support for teachers to build knowledge and change attitudes. When combined with school administration and school action plans, in-service training also helps to ensure that gender-equitable approaches become institutionalized (Parkes & Heslop, 2013). (See also Gennrich (2016) in Section II).

A number of manuals and teachers' guides have been developed on how to address gender in teaching and learning. For example, FAWE brought together 55 teachers from three schools in Tanzania, Kenya, and Rwanda to develop and pilot *Gender-Responsive Pedagogy: A Teacher's Handbook* (Mluma et al., 2005). This 42-page handbook was developed as a practical guide to address gender in day-to-day teaching, with the following objectives:

- To equip teachers with knowledge, skills and attitudes for gender responsive pedagogy;
- To enable teachers to develop and use gender responsive methodologies that ensure equal participation of both girls and boys in teaching and learning processes; and
- To assist school management to mainstream gender issues at the school level. (p. v)

The handbook contains 12 units that provide an overview and examples of what it means to take a gender-responsive approach in a number of different areas such as schools, pedagogy, lesson planning, teaching and learning materials, language use in classrooms, classroom setup, classroom interaction, management of sexual maturation, sexual harassment, school management systems, and monitoring and evaluation.

Participatory Methodologies for Addressing Sexual Health and Gender-based Violence

Peer education is growing as a popular approach for sexual health education. This model recognizes the limitations of information-based approaches to sexual health and HIV education, and the need for more participatory approaches that provide spaces for young people to discuss and question their own attitudes and experiences in negotiating gendered norms, desire, risk, and power.

Peer educational settings promote assimilation or accommodation of a range of individual's opinions within an evolving group process. Individual inputs weave and clash through the process of dialogue and argument between peers, as they ask one another questions, exchange anecdotes and comment on one another's experiences and points of view. (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002, p. 333)

Building on Freirean ideas about critical consciousness, peer education can be seen to work within transformative and feminist pedagogies that engage active and participatory learning, self-reflection, and critical thinking about social power and civic engagement to participate in social action towards alternative versions of reality (Ngidi & Moletsane, 2016).

In a secondary school in a Black Durban township, South Africa, Ngidi and Moletsane (2016) examined a peer education initiative involving both university and secondary school peer educators in addressing gender and sexual violence. This pilot project, *Inyathelo Lethu* (Our Initiative in both isiZulu and isiXhosa) involved 16 peer educators in a participatory curriculum development process using the following methods.

- 1) Peer educator training: Three-day training of peer educators (six from the Durban University of Technology and ten peer educators from a secondary school) through the Peer Education Program at the University's HIV/AIDS Centre. The university peer educators initially acted as mentors for the secondary school students. The training covered topics such as HIV prevention methods, prevention of gender violence, sexual and reproductive health, and basic facilitation and counseling skills.
- 2) Survey: With the researchers, the peer educators administered a survey at the secondary school to assess learners' knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, and needs regarding GBV.
- 3) Focus group discussions: With the researchers, the peer educators conducted FGDs with both male and female learners to follow-up on survey findings.
- 4) Participatory curriculum development workshops: The researchers facilitated a week-long workshop with peer educators to use the survey and FGD data to develop a peer education curriculum for addressing GBV in the secondary school. These workshops used a variety of participatory teaching and learning methods such as role-play, self-reflection, and small group discussions.
 - Introductory sessions: Most critical in the curriculum development process was for peer educators to reflect first on their own experiences, feelings and beliefs about violence. Every participant had experienced some form of GBV. The researchers found that both male and female peer educators normalized and accepted men's use of violence and the use of gender or sexual violence as a form of control. Many felt that men had the right to inflict violence on women, to show their manhood and masculinity, and as expressions of love. Peer educators did not consider rape as sexual abuse within intimate sexual relationships.
 - Day 1 and 2: Anger management, self-esteem, and assertive communication, drawing on assistance from two psychologists from the university counseling unit.



- Day 3 and 4: Personal experiences as perpetrators, survivors, or witnesses of violence. “After reflecting on their experiences, the participants agreed that violence caused major psychological and physical harm to both victims and perpetrators ... the reflection process helped in identifying and shifting individual points of view, and created a common goal of educating the school community about gender violence and its implications” (p. 73).
 - Day 5 and 6: Discussion about curriculum structure, content, and teaching strategies, as well as about who would deliver the curriculum. Development of a curriculum that included a variety of content (sex education, self-esteem, self-awareness, human rights, strategies for identifying, preventing and talking about gender violence, leadership skills, gender, and sexual equality) as well as transformative teaching and learning methods (role play and poetry, and circle or horse-shoe seating arrangements).
- 5) Peer facilitated workshops: Peer educators facilitated workshops at the secondary school over five consecutive days (6 hours each) during the winter school break. This intervention involved 200 learners, divided into groups of 40 (same sex groups on Day 1, mixed sex groups on the rest of the days).

Following the intervention, peer educators reported on how their perspectives of sexual violence changed, how they developed better listening and empathy skills, and an appreciation for and deeper understanding of the life stories of others. Further, many peer educators developed a sense of ownership of the project and felt inspired and empowered to take action in changing their own lives. Being involved in this peer education initiative helped youth move beyond the cognitive or academic literacy goals of information-based education initiatives to connect with gender violence issues on more deeply personal and emotional levels.

Departing from the traditional view of young people as ‘problems’ and in need of saving, the transformative pedagogies we used throughout the project saw the role of young people as resources not only in identifying issues that were negatively impacting their lives (such as gender violence), but also in finding strategies for addressing them. (Ngidi & Moletsane, 2015, p. 76)

However, perhaps reflecting the challenges with the implementation of critical literacies described above in Section II, critical approaches to sexual health education also have challenges. Evaluating an early participatory peer education program in a Black township school near Johannesburg, South Africa, Campbell and MacPhail (2002) found that a number of factors undermined the development of critical thinking and empowerment. These included a highly regulated school environment, teacher control of the program, peer educators’ preference for didactic methods and a biomedical approach, gender dynamics amongst peer educators, and learner attitudes towards the program. Additionally, a number of contextual factors had an impact on the program, including opportunities for communication about sex with peers, sexual partners, and adults, having adult role models of sexual relationships, and the community and macro-social environment (poverty, unemployment, civil participation, trust amongst community members).

Based on these findings, Campbell and MacPhail (2002) outlined a framework for successful peer education. First, peer education needs to consider how young people construct their social identities, in light of how sexuality is a “socially negotiated phenomenon, strongly influenced by group-based social identities, and more particularly peer identities” (p. 332).



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Second, drawing on Freire’s concept of critical consciousness, peer education needs to center empowerment. Often, empowerment is conceptualized in relation to individual emotional and motivational dimensions, which leads to a focus on girls’ and women’s assertiveness, self-esteem, and confidence. However, empowerment also requires attention to cognitive and intellectual dimensions that help young people analyze how social conditions such as gender and poverty influence their circumstances. Third, peer education models need to consider social capital, or “perceived citizen power” where “people feel [that] their needs and views are respected and valued, and where they have channels to participate in making decisions in the context of the family, school and neighborhood” (p. 334). Campbell and MacPhail recommended that,

- HIV prevention workers need to be involved in longer-term activities;
- HIV prevention workers, peer educator trainers, peer educators and target audiences need to understand the *philosophy* of peer education;
- Channels need to be developed through which young people can add their voices to a variety of local and national debates;
- Young people need to be able exercise real leadership and ownership of HIV-prevention programs within school contexts;
- School-based programs could work hand in hand with community development programs;
- Young people need more opportunities to become involved in local community organizations, and in community decision-making; and
- Parents and families need to be involved and supported in discussion about youth sexuality, to enhance greater levels of community awareness about the importance of open and frank communication about sex. (p. 342)

Participatory visual methodologies

Participatory visual methodologies (PVM) have also been shown to be promising and effective for addressing gender and sexual violence. In particular, scholars and associates at the Centre for Visual Methodologies for Social Change (CVMSC) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa have developed PVMs for use in the area of rural teacher education. For example, cellphilmaking involving the use of mobile phones to make short videos demonstrates the ways in which participants can use media to explore critical social issues such as gender inequities. A full review of the use of PVMs to address gender violence with youth and in teacher education is beyond the scope of this review, although the work of the CVMSC highlights the ways in which this work might be separated to consider: a) work with youth, especially girls and young women (Mitchell & de Lange, 2015; de Lange & Mitchell, 2014; MacEntee, 2015, 2016b); b) work with pre-service teachers (MacEntee, 2016c; Pithouse-Morgan, Van Laren, Mitchell, Mudaly, & Singh, 2015); and c) work with in-service teachers (Mitchell, de Lange, & Moletsane, 2016, Mitchell & de Lange, 2013).

Section Discussion

While comprehensive sexuality education is not traditionally associated with literacies research, the emerging area of sexual health literacies is critical to gender empowerment goals. With the interconnections between gender and sexuality, social norms about gender are constructed, in part, through social norms about sexuality and vice versa. Given the central role



of sexual health in either supporting or changing girls' life pathways in schooling but also more broadly, it is difficult to address gender empowerment without also addressing questions about sexuality. A comprehensive approach to sexuality education includes the need for more accessible information about sexual health, the need to address GBV, HIV and AIDS, and unwanted pregnancy, and the need for more critical discussion about what it means to have healthy relationships and safer sexual experiences. In this area, teachers are positioned as key agents of change. Clearly more research needs to be done to develop more inclusive approaches to literacy that pertain to addressing sexuality education and to addressing gender based violence.



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V) A GENDER-RESPONSIVE, WHOLE-SCHOOL APPROACH

Question: What school environments beyond the classroom could make a difference in relation to supporting girls as actors and knowers through literacy? In what ways can a child-friendly, whole-school approach address gender equality and transform the culture of schooling?

1. The gender parity *and awareness* of school staff plays an important role in supporting the learning of both boys and girls. Here, including more women teachers and leaders is critical for achieving parity. However, women's specific needs must also be considered and the feminization of teaching must be avoided. Additionally, all teachers and school leaders should be responsible for gender equality and be supported in this role.
2. School policies play an important role in shaping the culture of accepted, normalized and expected social interactions in schools, and need to address gender inequalities actively. For example, policies establishing teacher codes of conduct, positive approaches to discipline and classroom management, and sound mechanism for reporting sexual violence need to be developed and implemented.
3. Gender inequalities are often reinforced through the voluntary and assigned roles and activities of young people in schools, for example in relation to practices such as class prefects, student discipline, manual labor, and young people's play and interactions. Little research explores how to address these trends, or the role of the agency of young people in resisting or subverting gender norms.
4. In-school support systems such as guidance and counseling services, after-school clubs, and menstrual hygiene management initiatives have been identified as promising interventions for supporting girls, but little research has investigated these areas comprehensively.
5. Disability has been, for the most part, marginalized in the literature on girls' education. Little research investigates disability and literacy together, and none from a gender perspective. There is a need to better acknowledge and address how different forms of discrimination (such as poverty, gender, and disability) intersect.
6. School-based and community libraries can play an important role in supporting literacy and a reading culture, but there is limited gender research about libraries.
7. Very little research investigates the specific experiences of boys and how boys are affected by the girls' education movement. A gender-responsive, whole-school approach needs to include boys and men, and include questions about masculinity.

Section Overview

This section addresses the gendered dimensions of the school environment. Here the focus extends beyond the immediate classroom environment, to address Parkes and Heslop's (2013) recommendation to examine "the *conditions* in which teaching and learning take place" (p. 9, italics added). Importantly, the school environment is tremendously complex with many different factors and dimensions shaping the culture of a school. This section reflects how schools are simultaneously formal institutions (often state-run), but also unique, vibrant, and changing communities in and of themselves, with distinct characters and social dynamics (see



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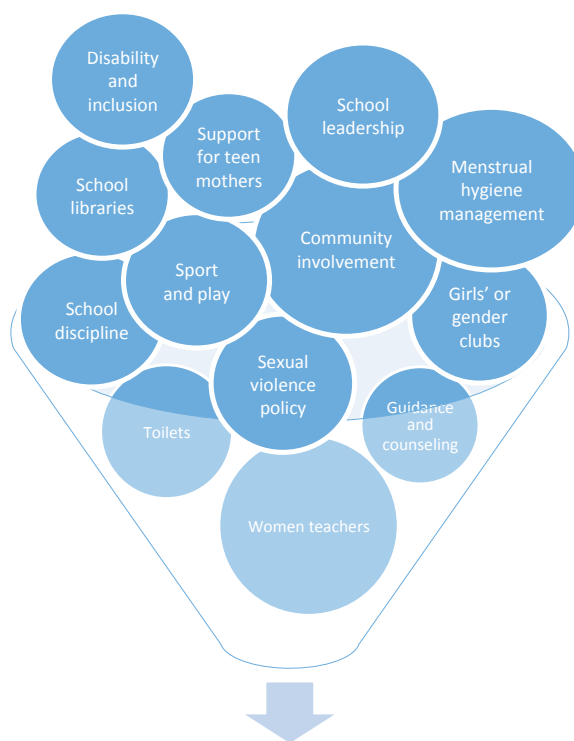


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Maringe et al., 2015). This section builds on research that identifies schools as key sites where gender relations and identities are constructed and actively negotiated, and of the need to develop whole-school child-friendly, rights-based, and gender-responsive approaches to education (Chege, 2006; Miske, 2013; Parkes & Heslop, 2013). One of the goals of a whole-school approach is to enable place-based and context-specific interventions aimed at school improvement (Maringe et al., 2015).

Central to a whole-school approach is the need to identify and address the many different ways that gendered hierarchies and relations are enacted in schools and the education system, more generally (Miske, 2013). Without losing sight of the broader policy environment, a whole-school approach aims to institutionalize change by addressing gender within the more formal aspects of school systems, such as policies, planning, governance structures, and infrastructural considerations (Parkes & Heslop, 2013). This section also explores gender in the informal school cultures, norms, and everyday practices. Significantly, this section underscores the need to address gender-based violence.

Figure 1 below presents an overview of the issues in the school environment. In this diagram, each of the balls represents a different aspect of the school environment, which is represented by the cone. The issues depicted in this image spill over, demonstrating just how many dimensions and factors need to be addressed in a gender-transformative approach. While each ball could be examined independently, the interconnections are also important. Any two (or three) balls could be interrelated, for example toilets and MHM or school leadership and women teachers. Additionally, a broader perspective might examine the cumulative impact of bringing together all the issues.



Gendered dimensions of the
Figure 1: Examples of gendered dimensions of the school environment



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Adding to this diagram, a gender-responsive whole-school approach also recognizes that gender norms, stereotypes, and violence in schools are related to gender relations outside of schools (UNFPA, 2016). Gender-responsive schools require an integrated, holistic, and collaborative approach that brings together various stakeholders from across multiple locations. These stakeholders include students, teachers, and school leadership, as well as families and community organizations. More gender-responsive schools also require collaboration with school governance and leadership, education ministries, district officials, teacher education institutes and unions, curriculum developers, and gender units and ministries.

Exemplifying the range of issues in the school environment that have a gendered impact on literacy achievements (math and reading), FAWE (2011) compared the national evaluations of Grade 2 and Grade 5 primary school students in 11 French-speaking African countries²⁶ (2004-2009). This large-scale statistical analysis distinguished between school environment factors that affect the learning of all children, and those factors that particularly affect girls. This study identified the following trends.

- In math, boys perform better than girls, and the gap widens at higher levels;
- Factors that negatively impact the achievements of all children include repeating a class, and additional household, farm, and paid work outside of class.
- Factors that support the success of all children include having access to adequate teaching and learning materials and equipment, an experienced school principal, regular school staff meetings, regular school support and supervision from school officials and administrative bodies, and help with homework, as well as living with another family or guardian (other than parent or grandparent) and reducing teacher absenteeism.
- Factors that specifically support the retention, completion, and achievements of girls include: Smaller class sizes, having female teachers, living in an urban area, supporting parental and in particular women's literacy, and language of instruction same as the language spoken at home.
- Research noted considerable disparities in gender distribution of teachers and school principals, with more women teachers in the lower levels and less female principals. Female principals tended to appoint more women in higher grade levels.

Table 5: FAWE (2011) recommendations for the school environment

Factors that support all children:	Factors that particularly support girls:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the rates of repetition • Improve classroom equipment • Raise awareness of parents about child labor • Improve pre-service and in-service teacher education about gender • Increase regularity of school inspections 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce class sizes • Establish mother's associations and women's literacy programs • Ensure teachers attend school • More gender equitable recruitment of teachers and principals • Improved support for rural schools • More support systems for students who live far from schools

²⁶ Benin, Burkina-Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Chad, Comoros, Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Madagascar, and Senegal.



This research exemplifies the complexity of the school environment and the importance of thinking about gender relations and literacy achievements holistically.

School-Related Gender-Based Violence (SRGBV)²⁷

Gender-based violence is among *the* top areas of concern and intervention in the field of girls' education. Identified in part by gender research in the context of the AIDS pandemic (Leach, 2006), this area is also informed by work about gender violence and education in other global contexts. For example, Jenny Horsman's (2000a) work with women in Canada, titled *Too scared to learn*, dealt with how their experiences of violence have an impact on learning; she articulated the need to break the silence about GBV in literacy learning.

Most of the literature on gender equality and girls' education in Africa reports on how different forms of gender violence affect girls' access to school, experiences in school, and decisions to leave school. In the last 15 years, vast numbers of gender and education projects have specifically addressed GBV in schools and communities. This ranges from Leach, Fiscian, Kadzamira, Lemani, and Machakanja's (2003) early study about SRGBV in African schools to projects such as the USAID *Safe Schools Program* (2003-2008) (Centre for Educational Research and Training and DevTech Systems, 2008; DevTech Systems, 2008), and ActionAid International project, *Stop Violence Against Girls* (2008-2013). An explosion of more recent work in this area, not the least of which includes the work of major international organizations: the UNICEF project, *End Gender Violence in Schools* (2015-2017); Plan International's *Because I am a Girl* campaign, annual publication, *State of the World's Girls* (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), and additional publications including *A Girls' Right to Learn Without Fear* (Greene, Robles, Stout and Suvilaakso, 2013); Leach, Slade and Dunne's (2013) major desk review for Concern, *Promising Practice in School-Related Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response Programming Globally*; and work related to the DFID Girls' Education Challenge and *DFID Guidance Note on Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls* (Taylor 2015a, 2015b). This list could go on. While a full review of this area is beyond the scope of this review (see additional resources in Appendix C – Comprehensive Bibliography), this is a robust field that is changing quickly. In a blog summarizing a major rigorous review of the global literature on SRGBV (Parkes et al., 2016), Jenny Parkes (2016)²⁸ wrote:

Our review found major gaps in evidence on how to provide the right kinds of learning environments and coordinated approaches [...] While interventions on sexual violence often focused on gender norms and inequalities, those targeting bullying and corporal punishment, or young people's engagements with gangs, violent crime, war and conflict rarely paid attention to the gender dynamics of these engagements.

Often the schemes to tackle these issues brought in outside experts to work with groups of young people, with little attention to teachers and school cultures. Those working with schools often paid insufficient attention to broader social norms and community dynamics. Rarely did the studies examine links between national laws and policies, and the ways these were understood and translated into action by district education, health, judicial or welfare services, teacher unions and training institutions, and local schools and communities.

²⁷ Violences de genre en milieu scolaire (VGMS)

²⁸ <https://ioelondonblog.wordpress.com/2016/10/11/ending-gender-violence-in-schools-what-works-and-what-does-research-tell-us/>



There were, however, some studies, mainly from Sub-Saharan Africa, that generated nuanced evidence on how to intervene on gender-based violence. The most promising interventions with girls, boys and teachers helped them to reflect critically on gender identities, norms and inequalities that shape the risk of gender-based violence. Often they helped to build knowledge on practical strategies to prevent or take action on gender-based violence in schools. These interventions tended to work also to promote inclusive, anti-violence school policies and rules, curricula and teaching approaches, and to work with parents, community members and with local support services. While specialist training was important for skilled facilitation on sensitive and controversial topics, this was most effective and sustainable when combined with the active participation of young people and those close to them in the design and implementation of interventions. (para 4-6)

A gender-responsive whole-school approach includes working collaboratively and in an integrated and participatory way to address gender violence with all key stakeholders in schools and communities, and at higher administrative levels.

It is critical that gender and literacy research considers the implications of GBV. Gender and literacy interventions need to be informed by the robust bodies of literature related to SRGBV, and attend to the connections between GBV and teaching and learning practices and materials. The Global Working Group to End SRGBV (2016) and *Global Guidance on Addressing SRGBV* (UNESCO & UN Women, 2016) offer comprehensive starting places for developing a research agenda.

Conceptualizing violence

Research about SRGBV emphasizes how, in addition to addressing violence in schools, there is a need to understand how gender violence reflects patterns rooted in **gender norms and social power** both inside and outside schools (Heslop, 2016; Parkes & Heslop, 2013). Evaluating a multi-country project, *Stop Violence Against Girls in School* in Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique, Parkes and Heslop (2013) wrote:

In order to understand patterns of violence against girls, it is important to look not just at the acts of violence and individual perpetrators and victims, but at the interactions in schools, families and communities that surround and underpin these acts, and at the inequitable institutions that perpetuate violence. (p. 7)

Critically, violence is often conceptualized in narrow terms that consider only personal and directly observable forms of violence. The ways that violence is conceptualized influences how violence is measured and addressed (Parkes et al., 2013). A number of conceptual models have emerged from the above projects that propose new ways of thinking about violence in increasingly complex ways.

Drawing on gender violence intervention work across 45 schools in Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique, Parkes et al. (2013) proposed a multi-dimensional approach that combines three conceptual points of departure for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of gender violence:

- 1) Personal acts of violence that focus on individual survivors and perpetrators;
- 2) Institutions and social structures that produce violence as a social practice; and
- 3) Interactions, which refers to the ongoing and relational nature of how violence is continuously performed and negotiated through everyday relationships.



This framework is represented in Figure 2 below, where the two outer rings represent institutions and social structures, the inner circle represents everyday interactions, and the various examples are individual acts of violence.

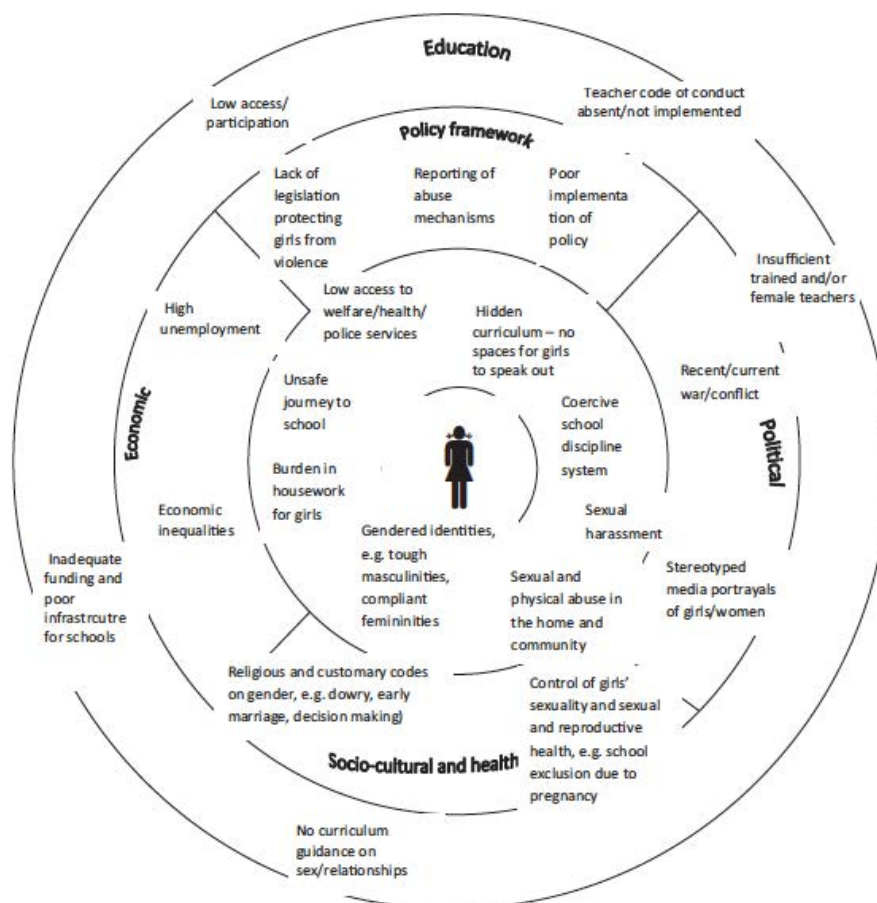


Figure 2: A conceptual framework for violence against girls in schools (Parkes et al., 2013)

Child-Friendly Schools (CFS)

Child-friendly school environments and classroom practices positively affect all children's learning and experiences of schooling but particularly that of girls (Miske, 2013). A child-friendly approach *integrates* single-factor education interventions (such as teacher development, textbook provision, and toilets) and moves beyond performance-based outcomes to consider more holistically the wellbeing and quality of children's participation in schooling (Wright, Mannathoko, & Pasic, 2009). While several different models that conceptualize a gender-responsive whole-school approach have been developed (see Examples of School Models below), the child-friendly is described here not because it is any better or more rigorous than the other models, but simply because the concept of child-friendly is indicated most explicitly in the name of the approach. In many ways, movements for child-friendly and more participatory schooling emerge from critiques of social power in school environments, more generally.

While schools ostensibly have a role to play in developing young peoples' freedom of expression and capacity for decision-making, they are often structured



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in a formal and authoritarian way, with young people having little real input into school governance. (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002, p. 334)

Responding to these concerns about how top-down approaches to schooling limit the agency and learning of young people, CFSs work within a rights-based framework that centers children. CFSs adopt more collaborative and participatory approaches to learning that address the overall quality of and conditions for learning by improving young people’s experiences at school and therefore helping to retain learners to complete their schooling.

According to the UNICEF²⁹, a rights-based, child-friendly school is **child-centered**, acting in the best interests of helping children reach their full potential, and **child-seeking** by identifying and working to include excluded children. It includes the criteria below.

A healthy and protective environment for children that is hygienic and safe including adequate water and sanitation facilities and classrooms, healthy policies and practices (free of drugs, corporal punishment, and harassment), and health services such as nutritional supplementation and counselling.

A gender-sensitive environment that promotes gender equality in both enrolment and achievement, eliminates gender stereotypes and violence, and guarantees girl-friendly facilities, curricula, textbooks, and teaching-learning processes, and encourages respect for each other’s rights, dignity, and equality.

An inclusive environment that provides free and accessible education that supports all children, regardless of gender, social class, ethnicity, and ability level, with particular attention to valuing diversity, families and children considered ‘at risk’ and avoiding discrimination or stereotypes on the basis of difference.

Quality pedagogical approaches and materials that are effective for helping children learn and teaching children *how* to learn, with individualized instruction appropriate to the various developmental levels, abilities, and learning styles of children, and with active, cooperative, and democratic learning methods. This includes supporting teacher capacity, morale, commitment, status, and income.

Involves **children, families, and communities** in schooling, including child-centred, family-focused, and community-based initiatives that encourage children’s participation, strengthens families, and develops community partnerships to promote children’s education and general wellbeing. (para.4)

As CFS models continue to evolve and vary from context to context, the following manual offers guidance for schools and organizations wishing to take up such an approach:

Wright, C., Mannathoko, C., & Pasic, M. (2009). *Child-friendly schools manual*. New York: UNICEF.

A Healthy and Protective Environment

Infrastructure and physical school environment

Access to basic services is a critical aspect of SDG 4: “Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and

²⁹ https://www.unicef.org/lifeskills/index_7260.html



effective learning environments for all.” Improving access to safe schools, basic services and strengthening infrastructure in schools benefits all learners and school staff, but in particular girls and members of disadvantaged groups (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).

Distance between home and school

Reducing the time and distance to get to school supports girls’ education in a number of ways (UNFPA, 2016). For example, having schools closer to home can alleviate parental concern about sending girls long distances, can reduce girls’ risk of gender and sexual violence along the journey to school, and free up time for girls to balance their academic study with household and paid work.

Water and sanitation at school

Regarding drinking water and sanitation, according to UNESCO (2016d), approximately half of all primary schools in Africa do not have access to drinking water, and one third of primary schools do not have toilets. In some contexts such as Mauritius and Chad, up to 70 percent of schools do not have toilets. Access to water and sanitation are slightly better in lower secondary schools. Adequate access to water and sanitation directly affects student attendance, but particularly that of girls. Access to sanitation is critical for girls’ safety, health, dignity, and school performance. In addition to increasing the numbers and quality of toilets in schools, single sex toilets are recommended (Parkes & Heslop, 2013). In addition, Mitchell’s (2009) research with girls about gender violence in and around schools in South Africa and Swaziland identified the risk of sexual violence in school toilets, and the recommendation that school toilets be located in less isolated areas in closer proximity to school buildings.

Electricity and computers at school

Concerning electricity, UNESCO (2016d) reports that 80 percent of lower secondary schools in some countries (such as Côte d’Ivoire, South Africa, Morocco, and Namibia) have access to electricity. However, the vast majority of primary and lower secondary schools in other countries do not have access to electricity. Access to computers for pedagogical purposes is more widespread in secondary schools, and vary widely in primary schools (ranging from 1 percent of schools in Cameroon to over 75 percent in Botswana) (UNESCO, 2015b).

School policy and leadership

School policies and leadership play an important role in shaping the school environment. These factors serve to both identify the guiding principles and values that inform the objectives of schooling, as well as the professional and ethical practices of teachers and administrations, including:

- School policies against forms of discipline and corporeal punishment such as kneeling or squatting (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).
- Codes of conduct for teachers, developed and implemented in collaboration with teacher unions and shared widely with the school and wider community (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).

Such policies play an important role in developing much needed mechanisms for effectively addressing gender relations in schools in a transparent way that promotes accountability. In addition to having policies in place, research needs to examine the different ways in which policies are enacted.



Exploring place-based and context-specific leadership strategies for school improvement more generally in the context of South Africa, Maringe et al. (2015) pose the following research questions: *In what ways do broad-brush educational reform policies help those schools facing intersecting challenges and different forms of poverty? What factors characterize these schools? How do different school communities perceive the impacts of these challenges in their schools? What types of leadership are useful and appropriate for facing and overcoming these challenges?* (adapted from p. 369). Exploring these questions through research at three rural schools, this study identified four key factors that were strongly linked with school success:

- (1) Leadership that went beyond an ordinary focus on instruction;
- (2) Staff stability;
- (3) Flexible scheduling that allowed parental involvement; and
- (4) A focus on a school-wide project that acted as a rallying point and a source of pride for the entire school. (p. 363)

In the area of SRGBV, Chege's (2006) research at primary schools in Kenya found that teachers and school administrations dealt with sexual harassment inconsistently. This study found that the actions of leaders reflected the ways that leaders constructed their own identities. At one primary school in Nairobi, the male Head Teacher ignored or trivialized girls' complaints of sexual abuse by either failing to investigate them and, instead, asking the accused teachers about the behaviors of the girls, or by covering up the behavior of male colleagues who abused girls, thus fostering a culture of silence. In this school, the burden to provide proof of abuse was on girls. Chege (2006) wrote:

By ignoring the teacher code of conduct with regard to sexual behavior, the head-teacher—himself a male in authority—was producing the form of identity, which...makes it difficult to see beyond individual acts of force or oppression to a structure of power or a set of social-relations with scope and permanence. (p. 34)

This leads to the concerns about students giving up on reporting violence to school authorities.

At the same time, at another primary school in Nairobi, the Head Teacher took a different, more collaborative approach. Constructing himself as a professional administrator, teacher, and parent, this Head Teacher involved a council of education deputies and teachers to best investigate sexual misconduct. This teacher demonstrated an awareness of the sensitivity of the issue with a very serious impact on the students in the school, the culture of schooling, and the ultimate aims of education. Yet, this teacher also recognized the implications of such allegations for accused teachers, and the violent forms of community retribution for sex offenders.

In-school gender policies and initiatives sometimes change or dissipate over time. Gender initiatives need to be institutionalized and monitored carefully, with specific indicators, in collaboration with school administrations, in-service training, district officials and ministries, and the broader school communities (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).

Women Teachers and Leaders

Women play an important role in shaping the school environment. This is particularly significant in many sub-Saharan African contexts, as noted by UNESCO (2012a):

While women generally make up the majority of primary teachers in the world, there are more male teachers in sub-Saharan Africa. It has the lowest percentage of female primary teachers (43%). (p. 12)



This gender balance is changing with a number of African countries that are seeing higher and higher numbers of newly-recruited female teachers, generally reflecting increasing gender balance in the workforce more generally (UNESCO, 2012a).

Recruiting and retaining more women teachers is framed as a key strategy for supporting girls' education and empowerment (UNESCO, 2012a). Women's presence in schools is seen to provide the following benefits: 1) Women are seen to be approachable and sympathetic, capable of providing guidance, counseling and care to support students' emotional needs; 2) Women are seen to be good professional role models for girls; 3) Women's presence in schools models the social and cultural acceptability of male/female interactions in the school environment; and 4) Women are seen to reduce the amount of sexual harassment and violence against girls (despite how women teachers also experience sexual harassment) (Shepler & Routh, 2012; Stromquist, Klees, & Lin, 2017). In Zambia, Sayers (1994, cited in Shepler & Routh, 2012) found a positive correlation between girls' confidence and enjoyment, and their perception about the utility of math and having a female math teacher. Comparing education in Ghana and Botswana, Dunne and Leach (2005) showed positive correlations between female teachers and the participation and achievement of female students. With a focus on rural areas, Mitchell and Yang (2012) reiterate some additional underlying rationales for deploying more women teachers.

Women are already there, it is argued, as opposed to men who may be involved in migration to urban centres or specific work sites such as mines or construction, and may be available to work as untrained (and hence lower-paid) teachers. There are also widespread beliefs that women are 'natural' teachers for young children.

Sometimes employment in and of itself is seen as empowering for women. (p. 2)
However, while increasing gender parity among teaching staff members is important, research cautions against simply adding women to the school environment and highlights more complex considerations. There is a need to actively address patriarchy and the systemic nature of gender inequality in order to *transform* the culture of schooling. This means engaging both men and women teachers, school leadership, and the wider community in efforts to address gender equality.

Increasing the number of female teachers and female students will not, by itself, alleviate the disparities in formal education between girls and boys. However, it may be a stepping stone to the larger, transformational changes that are needed to foster gender equitable societies. (Shepler & Routh, 2012, p. 439)

Women teachers and classroom assistants *who understand gender discrimination* are effective role models for girls and make schools safer in both conflict and non-conflict contexts. (Miske, 2013, p. 14, italics added)

The fact that low-income countries will need twice as many teachers by 2030 (Education Commission, 2016) presents additional questions about gender and teaching. In this context of a dire and growing demand for teachers alongside the call for more women teachers, as well as the implementation of fast-track teacher education models to train and recruit more teachers quickly, there is a need to attend to the risk of the feminization of teaching, particularly at primary levels. While teaching remains relatively stable and high-paying government employment in sub-Saharan Africa, especially where men dominate teaching staff, there are concerns about how overall reductions in basic aid negatively affects teacher salaries (UNESCO, 2014a). Much of the debate around the feminization of teaching is whether having more women teachers contributes



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to lowering teacher salaries and thus developing new forms of inequalities (Mitchell & Yang, 2012).

Gender-responsive schools need to attend to the specific needs of women teachers, and how these needs change in urban and rural contexts. Women teachers are particularly under-represented in rural areas and Mitchell and Yang (2012) question how the feminization of teaching affects women teachers in rural areas. In Senegal and Cameroon, women teachers explained that this trend reflects marital responsibilities such as their and their husband's rights to decide where the couple live (FAWE, 2011). Of critical significance is that women often have multiple responsibilities that extend beyond their paid work. "The patriarchal structures and the burden of care for which rural women teachers are responsible suggests the need for structures that recognize the double and triple shifts that women teachers take up in their teaching and personal lives" (Mitchell & Yang, 2012, p. 3). Many of these responsibilities mean that women are either less available outside of official schools hours, or overburdened with work in ways that many men are not. In primary schools in Cameroon and Senegal, women teachers requested teaching lower grade levels because lower grades have lower workloads and require less time outside of official school hours (FAWE, 2011). Research across Liberia, Tanzania, Togo, and Uganda found that the lack of suitable housing emerged as a chief challenge for women teachers, many of whom have children (Stromquist, Klees, & Lin, 2017). Here, housing was identified as a concern in general, but in particular in relation to teacher education programs as well as in rural areas where infrastructural constraints (lack of access to electricity, water services, health services, and markets) intensify women's workloads. Women teachers' intensified workloads may affect not only their wellbeing but that of others, too. Shepler and Routh (2012) noted that while female teachers may help reduce sexually exploitative relationships in schools, other forms of exploitation may emerge. In a rural secondary school in Guinea, Baldé (2004, cited in Shepler & Routh, 2012) found that female teachers assigned extra domestic labor to girls in exchange for higher grades because their professional obligations related to teaching limited their time to do household work. Also, research suggests that some women teachers face gendered challenges in accessing their pay, sometimes needing to negotiate requests for sexual favors from male education administrators (Shepler & Routh, 2012), or struggling to find the time to leave their families and household responsibilities to travel from rural areas to nearby towns to cash their pay cheques (Stromquist, Klees, & Lin, 2017).

In sum, research has "paid little attention to the experiences of women teachers both as *teachers* and as *women*, and when a *rural* component is also factored in, there is even less that is known about women's experiences" (Mitchell & Yang, 2012, p. 2). Mitchell and Yang (2012) recommended the need for better education policies and institutions that support women teachers professionally, and more in-depth research through participatory approaches such as memory work and the use of the visual, on the complexities of the lives of women teachers.

Promoting women's leadership

In a report about gender and educational leadership across Ethiopia, Brana International Consultancy (2012) identified gaps between gender equality policy and practice. Exploring the status of women leaders and the views of educational leaders, teachers, communities, and students from across various administrative levels (regional, bureau, *woreda* (district), and school), the study highlighted the following major findings.

- Women leaders are under-represented in general, but are more prevalent at lower levels of leadership. Women represent 11.2 percent of leaders at lower levels (supervisors, school



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principals, and vice presidents) and 9.5 percent at upper levels (bureau heads, vice bureau heads, process owners, *woreda* heads). Notably, lower level leadership positions are earned through competition whereas upper levels are appointed. This indicates gender bias in the political appointing structures.

- Most participants believed that women could be effective leaders. However, female leadership was not being identified or addressed as an educational issue in management structures.
- Gender and education policy is too general, lacks coherence and specific implementation guidelines, and limits the possible actions that could better support women's leadership.
- Women have multiple roles and responsibilities, leaving less time and energy to take on additional responsibilities, in particular when working conditions are not flexible (such as meetings on weekends and holidays). Also, some women report not being confident enough or interested in applying for leadership positions. However, as a result of stereotypes about women, many women are less likely to be *encouraged* to pursue leadership positions.
- Many educational officials lack understanding of women's specific needs and deploy women to remote or difficult locations, leading many women leaders to quit.
- Institutions at the regional and *woreda* levels lack a culture of gender inclusion, and there is no monitoring or accountability as to how gender policies are implemented.

Qualitative research about women's experiences in positions as school principals at disadvantaged primary and secondary schools in South Africa and Zimbabwe presented more optimistic and nuanced insights about how women leaders are transcending gendered barriers. In Naidoo and Perumal's (2014) research in South Africa, women principals reported needing to use a variety of different leadership styles depending on the context and situation, including horizontal, autocratic, invitational, transformative, laissez-faire, and ethical. The three women in this study valued democracy, and a leadership style that demonstrated "a strong moral and spiritual Christian ethic" (p. 6). In this study, the authors often rely on gender stereotypes to describe women leaders as having feminine attributes such as nurturing, caring, maternal qualities, compassion, and spirituality. The women reported difficulties engaging parents and grandparents in the schooling process, and overcoming staff resistance and malaise as a major leadership challenge. In their home lives, the principal referred to husbands in restrictive terms. The two principals who did not have husbands relied strongly on their sisters and mothers for household support. The one woman who had a husband indicated conflict between her work and her home responsibilities.

In Zikhali and Perumal's (2015) research at socio-economically disadvantaged schools in Zimbabwe, 12 women school leaders (5 school heads, 4 deputy school heads, and 3 teachers-in-charge) described the emotional labor they faced negotiating their responsibilities. At the research schools, there are proportionately high percentages of orphan children (in one school, 4 in 10 children were considered orphans), such that women leaders negotiated the emotional labor of providing adequate care to meet the basic food and clothing needs of these schoolchildren. Women leaders navigated gender stereotypes (that, for example, only men could be strong leaders) in the sense that they had to convince both their colleagues and community leaders that they were competent leaders, and often felt torn between social expectations of them as motherly and understanding, and the need to firmly achieve educational goals. School leaders navigated parents who could not or would not contribute to school projects or attend school meetings. Lastly, women negotiated emotional labor balancing professional and social expectations related to curriculum leadership, administrative responsibilities, and, in some cases, their additional



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roles as classroom practitioners. However, despite these challenges, women were proud of their positions, responsibilities, and status as leaders.

To support women leaders and women teachers, Mitchell and Yang (2012) recommended establishing mentorship programs and women teacher-friendly programs to women to take on leadership roles, and, in particular, in more isolated and rural schools.

Gendered School Cultures

School culture refers to the standards, norms, values, beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions that influence how a school functions. School culture reflects aspects of the physical environment, written codes and policies, and representation of diverse groups, but school culture also includes the broad unwritten rules, practices, and activities. Research shows that school cultures often reinforce gender difference and inequality explicitly and implicitly. Of significant concern is how the culture of schooling is often more effective at teaching and replicating dominant gender stereotypes and forms of social order than at transforming them (FAWE, 2011). Writing about schools in South Africa, Buthelezi (2003) described how gender norms and stereotypes are perpetuated in many different dimensions of schooling:

From the differentiated school uniforms (dresses for girls and trousers for boys), to the differentiated school rules (boys to cut their hair short and girls to tie their hair with ribbons), to the different sports (rugby for boys and netball for girls), to the schoolbooks read in class and in school libraries, gender stereotypes are entrenched deeply throughout the school culture. (p. 28)

Classroom dynamics

O-saki and Agu's (2002) qualitative study of school culture at 20 primary schools in Tanzania involved observation, focus groups and interviews. It involved 20 head teachers, 60 teachers, and 1100 children from Standards 3, 5 and 6/7 and included many subject areas (math, English, Kiswahili, social studies, home economics, and science). They noted the following trends:

Teacher directives and commands: Teachers were mostly at the front of the classroom talking, using factual recall and short lessons with written exercises. When teachers were busy grading, this took away from instruction time. Teachers tended to ask boys more questions (for every question to a girl, 5 to 8 questions were addressed to boys) and more difficult questions. In urban schools, female teachers asked girls more questions. In general, teachers tended to give students very little feedback and little homework.

Physical arrangements and seating plans: Classrooms were small, crowded, and lacking in adequate resources (desks, chairs, etc.). Desks were arranged in rows, facing the chalkboard. At disadvantaged schools, children (especially the girls) sat on the floor. Movement around the room was hindered and conversation between students was discouraged.

In rural schools, boys and girls tended to sit separately. Girls did not want to sit near boys as to avoid harassment. In urban schools, girls and boys sat together. Teachers reported applying mixed seating arrangements after a gender-training workshop.

Research recommends group learning in classrooms (Unterhalter et al., 2014), and combinations of single- and mixed-sex groups.



Class prefects

Qualitative research as part of the FAWE (2011) research series compared the gender implications of class prefect practices in primary schools in Senegal and Cameroon. Regardless of whether classes had one prefect (as in Cameroon) or a more equitable boy/girl pairs of prefects, gender stereotypes were maintained in both contexts through the tasking of girls with cleaning and lesson supervision, and boys with discipline, cleaning the blackboard, and keeping the classroom keys.

Despite Tanzanian government regulation that school leaders be elected, teachers across 20 primary school tended to appoint student leaders, privileging boys perceived to be tough as prefects with girls as assistants. In Zanzibar, where both girls and boys were elected, boys were given more power and responsibility (O-saki & Agu, 2002).

Discipline

Adding to general concerns about corporal punishment like the use of violent forms of discipline such as caning (O-saki & Agu, 2002), research shows the teachers' gendered beliefs lead to the use of different forms of discipline and punishment for boys and girls.

Research from several French-speaking countries in West and Central Africa shows that teachers are more likely to be more lenient towards the behaviors of girls, and boys are more likely to receive corporal punishment (Chege, 2006; FAWE, 2011). However, this distinction might not be the case in all classrooms and contexts (see for example, researcher observations in Cameroon that noted no gender distinctions, FAWE, 2011).

Chege (2006) teased out the active and ongoing effects of these differences in the construction of particular types of femininities and masculinities. Male teachers were more likely to beat boys, using violence to construct boyhood and reinforcing ideas about the need for boys to build tough masculinities. Many boys believed they had to develop a tolerance for violence and aggression in order to become strong men. As Chege (2006) noted, this has the effect of “transforming boys into violent abusive men” (p. 31). Girls saw these forms of corporal punishment as being discriminatory against boys, as creating humiliation, bitterness, and shame amongst boys, but also as constructing girls as being weaker.

Male teachers sexualized girls and used forms of sexual suggestion and harassment to discipline them. Girls felt that boys received harsher forms of discipline because male teachers sought sexual relationships with girls. Boys and girls described classrooms as sexually threatening spaces and many girls described the sexual advances of their male teachers and their speaking to and treating girls in sexually explicit ways during classes as unwanted, and their sexuality untrustworthy and repulsive. In addition to objectifying girls and often linking compliance with girls' grades, this particular sexualized treatment of girls often left boys feeling ignored and rejected by teachers.

Manual labor

O-saki and Agu's (2002) observations at 20 primary schools in Tanzania showed that students are often tasked with gender-specific forms of labor in school as well as at teachers' homes and farms, particularly in rural areas. For example, boys were tasked with carrying firewood to teachers' houses, constructing and repairing latrines, and carrying crops to production stations. Girls fetched water for teachers and washed teachers' clothes, pounded grains, and cooked for teachers. They also brought firewood and charcoal for sale in the village. A close analysis of children's work at one particular school showed how girls—in particular older girls—typically spend more time out of school on these forms of labor while boys are in



school studying. The authors expressed concern about sexual abuse, given the amount of time girls spent working at teachers' homes. Interviews indicated that all children were uncomfortable working as laborers for their teachers, especially during school hours.

Gendered play and interactions

Young people's play and informal interactions form a part of school culture as an accepted aspect of everyday life at all levels of schooling. Play and informal interactions can replicate or challenge dominant gender norms, and they shape both young people's sense of gender identity and their experiences of schooling, more generally.

In preschools in Botswana, Letsholo (2013) found that both boys and girls not only played with stereotypical gendered toys such as dolls (girls) and trucks (boys) but actively reinforced which toys were for girls and which were for boys. When girls transgressed gender stereotypes by building their own houses, the boys dismissed the legitimacy of the girls' houses. When one girl asserted, "I'm a strong girl" (p. 110) and tried to help a boy push his bicycle through the sand, his friends taunted him and he rejected her help.

At primary schools in Tanzania, O-saki and Agu (2002) observed girls playing local games that could be adapted to smaller, restricted spaces, while boys played football and volleyball in the open field, and also went running. Boys took up more space and used the schoolyard more freely. Here, teachers had little to say about the games that children play.

Through ethnographic research in primary schools in South Africa, Bhana (2005) studied seven- and eight-year old girls' schoolyard play. Often, schoolyard songs rely on quite stereotypical gendered and heteronormative tropes about girls, boys, kissing, love, and marriage. Whereas young children are often deemed too young or innocent to know about or discuss sexuality, many of children's favorite songs and games implicitly reenact and teach dominant heterosexual norms. However, Bhana complicates the normative role of play to examine girls' strategic use of games and songs to build and reconfigure their collective gendered identities. In some ways, girls resist constraining norms related to femininity (where girls are polite, fearful, chaste) by expressing so called rude or vulgar forms of play, for example chanting songs about farting and playing games such as "show me the panties" (during which a group of girls lift their skirts to taunt boys). Girls employ these forms of play to mock, shock, and humiliate boys, and assert girls' agentic identities. Girls also enjoyed sexualized chasing games such as "kiss-kiss-chase" (during which boys chase and kiss girls), as expressions and negotiations of their gendered and sexual identities.

Research in secondary schools highlights a disconnect between curriculum goals and school cultures that perpetuate inequitable gender norms and violence, predominantly against women and girls. Through ethnographic research at a coeducational secondary school in Uganda, Mirembe and Davies (2001) found the gendered school culture to contradict the curriculum goals. Whereas the curriculum promoted gender equality in the areas of sexual health and HIV education, the school culture reinforced dominant gender norms of inequality. First, everyday interactions between teachers and learners supported views about hegemonic masculinities (toughness, firmness, authoritativeness) that position men as the expected dominant leaders. Second, gendered discipline patterns meant that girls' behaviors were more policed than boys, with girls' facing higher expectations about obedience, being in need of protection, and in relation to girls' hair styles. Third, both girl learners and female teachers routinely experienced sexual harassment (intimidation, abusive comments, teasing, graffiti) from both male students and teachers but the school administration did little to acknowledge this problem. Fourth, the



school culture promoted normative forms of heterosexuality in relation to boy-girl relationships, where boys are expected to prove their masculinities through sexual exploits with girls, and girls are expected to submit to the advances of boys. These normalized practices negated the impacts of the AIDS curriculum. While approaches to sexual health education often aim to curb the sexual risk-taking of adolescents, Mirembe and Davies repositioned the idea of risk with dominant cultures of schooling.

In both urban and rural secondary school settings in the South African province of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Balfour and Ralfe (2006) found a dissonance between critical literacy curriculum interventions and the gender norms and stereotypes perpetuated by learners' everyday language and behavior. In the context of lessons and learning materials, students demonstrated awareness about gender and engaged critically in gender analysis learning activities. Yet in both classrooms and schoolyards boys perpetuated gender violence by both sexually assaulting girls and using intimidating, harassing, demeaning, and threatening language when talking to and about girls and female teachers. Schools mostly underplayed these abuses, reinforcing the normalization of gender inequality. Balfour and Ralfe recommend the need to attend more broadly to patriarchal gender stereotypes, attitudes, and perceptions in schools and communities.

School-Based Support Systems

A number of school-based strategies have demonstrated effectiveness in supporting girls' learning and experiences at school, including increasing girls' confidence, self-esteem, confidence, and their likelihood to report violence.

Mentors, guidance, and counseling

In-school counselors and female mentors play an important role supporting girls' education (Marcus & Page, 2016). Research of the role of female in-school mentors for girls has primarily focused on protecting girls from sexual and gender-based violence in schools.

For example, assessing a Guardian Program implemented in 1996 in primary schools in Tanzania, Mgalla, Schapink and Boerma (1998) found that the program protected girls against sexual exploitation. The program involved one woman teacher from each school; one-day training conducted by district education office staff using role play and group discussions regarding sexual health issues, counseling techniques, and how to deal with cases of abuse; district-level committees to support guardians; and mutual support groups for guardians at the ward levels (7-10 schools per ward).

The program helped spur much-needed debate about sexual violence at local, regional, and national levels. Comparing schools with and without the program, the research found that girls attending schools with a guardian were more likely to report incidents of sexual abuse both in schools and in communities, or seek advice or help from the guardian. Notably, "the difference was most striking in the case of sexual harassment by teachers: No girl in a school without a guardian said they would go to a woman teacher, while 52 percent of girls in schools with guardians said they would consult the guardian" (p. 26). Additionally, the guardians organized activities for girls that were attended by many. The program had particularly strong impacts at curbing sexual violence when there were effective links between the guardians and the local parents, school committee, and village leaders, and, in some cases, villages implemented new community policies and responded more quickly. The biggest impact of the guardian program was that sexual abuse was less hidden, and discussed more openly by communities. One downfall of the program was that the guardians often opposed the sexual activities of girls that



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then limited their potential role in providing contraceptives and appropriate sexual health information.

Another study explored the role of classroom assistants in post-conflict and refugee contexts in West Africa. In 2002, the UNHCR and Save the Children's report *Sexual Violence and Exploitation: The Experience of Refugee Children in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone* revealed alarming rates of sexual exploitation of refugee children. This report stated, "In [Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone], agency workers from international and local NGOs as well as UN agencies were reportedly the most frequent sex exploiters of children, often using the very humanitarian aid and services intended to benefit the refugee population as a tool of exploitation" (UNHCR & Save the Children, 2002, p. 4).

In response, the IRC launched in 2002 the *Healing Classrooms Initiative* to address how teachers in refugee schools are almost exclusively men. Kirk and Winthrop (2008) described how this initiative introduced the idea of female classroom assistants (CAs) with a mandate to support girls' learning by creating girl-friendly spaces in schools and protecting girls from sexual exploitation and abuse. With a minimum education requirement of Grade 9, young women completed two to five days of training in the areas of lesson planning, team teaching, tracking girls' attendance and grades, communication and counselling skills, and child protection topics related in particular to sexual violence. CAs attended school and sat in classrooms with girls and also did some home visits. An evaluation of the CA program found that while they did not completely eliminate sexual abuse in schools, teachers did change their behaviors and came to interact in more respectful ways with female students. By interacting with individual girls and running group activities for girls, CAs provided mentors and confidantes, which has in turn encouraged girls' confidence and participation in classroom learning and activities. Additionally, it was found that the presence of another adult in the classroom improved the quality of teaching instruction and classroom management.

However, Kirk and Winthrop (2008) also cautioned against relying on para-professional, unqualified women alone to change entire patriarchal systems. Given the complex gender dynamics of school environments, CAs were placed in a somewhat tricky position. First, the teachers were initially hostile towards the CAs, and saw them as sex police. While teachers gradually accepted the CAs, many were also reluctant to give up any power or share teaching responsibilities. Additionally, it turned out that while many students liked and appreciated the CAs, the students felt that CAs were not respected and were tasked with hard work for low pay.

As the field of Girls' Education expands and more comprehensive approaches are developed to support girls in schools, approaches to in-school mentors have improved. More recently, the work of the non-profit organization Campaign for Female Education (CAMFED) is celebrated for supporting girls' education and empowerment in Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. According to CAMFED International (2016), the organization provides a wide range of targeted support for girls' education. These interventions include grants for schools to support vulnerable children, in-school support to improve learning environments, training and start-up grants for parental involvement groups, bursaries for girls to cover costs associated with school fees, exams, uniforms, learning materials, sanitary supplies and disability aids when appropriate, and multiple other types of psycho-social forms of support in school environments.

In 2013, CAMFED launched a Learner Guide Program that trains young women secondary school graduates to return to their local school and serve as role models and mentors. Working with schools, communities, and governments, Learner Guides implement CAMFED's



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My Better World life skills and wellbeing program, covering areas including both academic and emotional support, skill building, and sexual and reproductive health information. To date, 4505 Learner Guides trained in Ghana, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe operate in 1070 partner schools (CAMFED International, 2016). CAMFED reports that this program generates striking results and offers a scalable model to improve the educational outcomes of marginalized populations. An independent evaluation of this program was conducted by the University of Cambridge using literacy and numeracy data from Tanzania and Zimbabwe, and found strong statistical evidence that CAMFED programs have generated an “unprecedented uplift in learning outcomes”³⁰ for all groups, including marginalized and less marginalized boys and girls with and without disabilities. While Learner Guides are not paid, they gain access to interest-free loans and mobile phones. Also, certification processes are underway for Learner Guides to earn vocational qualifications. CAMFED also has a Transition Program to support girls through the transition from secondary school to young adulthood and CAMFED’s alumnae program, CAMA, is touted as the largest network of its kind in Africa with membership expected to reach 100,000 in 2017.

Gender clubs and girls’ clubs

Girls’ clubs and gender clubs are widely promoted across the scholarly and development literature as important interventions to better support girls’ experiences of schooling, combat gender violence, and promote gender equality. Extra-curricular clubs are positioned as helping students develop greater aspirations, regardless of whether they are open to girls only or also to boys (Marcus & Page, 2016). Clubs are celebrated as helping students to develop peer communities, learn new skills, and connect class-based learning with hobbies and other personal interests. Strongly connected to gender empowerment work, clubs also help to provoke expanded view literacies beyond classrooms and school-based literacies, to include more diverse views of literacy practices and to provide a venue for literacy activities to take place. Research has explored both primary and secondary school girls’ engagement with literacy activities across school and extra-curricular clubs and activities.

Through a 5-year ActionAid project across Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique, researchers found primary schools’ Girls’ Clubs to be an effective starting point for addressing violence against girls in school (Heslop, 2016; Parkes & Heslop, 2013). These studies found evidence that Girls’ Clubs increased girls’ knowledge about gender, rights, and violence, and provided spaces for more open discussion about these topics in ways that enabled girls to break taboos and report violence. Girls’ gained increased confidence to challenge violence, establish solidarity with other girls, and comfort each other with discourses about the importance of girls’ education.

In this project, researchers reported differing correlations between knowledge about violence and reporting practices. While the project teams used similar approaches to Girls’ Clubs in each context, they produced very different results. In Mozambique, where the project community took place in a rural area that was close to a major road and the capital city, girls were more likely to report sexual violence and receive appropriate healthcare and counseling support. In Ghana, the project took place in a more remote rural area, where topics related to sexuality were more taboo and the focus of the Girls’ Clubs tended to be more on how to avoid, challenge, or report sexual aggression, as opposed to learning about the root causes and working to change gender norms. Here, girls were more likely to report physical violence but not sexual violence. Notably, clubs need skilled facilitators.

³⁰ <https://camfed.org/latest-news/unprecedented-uplift-in-learning-outcomes/>



Kendrick, Early, and Chemjor's (2013) study of a journalism club for girls at under-resourced school in Kenya provided a transformative learning space in-between exam-oriented classrooms and the critical practices of journalists. The club provided a low-risk place for girls to practice, play, and experiment with new skills and identities (as journalists). Because of their involvement in the club, girls developed greater confidence through an iterative process of experimenting, gaining confidence, becoming more accomplished at interviewing and more politically-engaged, and developing more competent writing skills. Through this process, girls saw themselves differently and gained more confidence to speak out about contested subjects, such as injustice and taboo topics (e.g. HIV and AIDS, gender violence, domestic violence). With the vested belief of one teacher and minimal inputs from the researchers (e.g. digital voice recorders and a newspaper subscription), the girls thrived. One of the girls' written pieces was eventually published in an international magazine.

As discussed earlier in relation to multiliteracies, Mattos (2013) explicitly explored girls' literacy practices with a girls' reading for pleasure club in South Africa. Here, five girls were inspired to start their own reading club after being involved in a Young Women's Group—a monthly group that exposed the girls to different types of reading club activities (songs, oral storytelling, discussing story elements, reading bilingual texts, and writing short stories). While a teacher was initially involved, the girls eventually branched off on their own because they preferred operating independently without teacher instruction.

These studies demonstrate just how different each club can be, and indicate the need for more research about what is happening with girls' and gender clubs. Research about girl's and youth clubs in Finland for example (see Honkasalo, 2013; Oinas, 2017) raises more critical questions about which girls are included and excluded from clubs, the views and practices of adults and youth workers who facilitate club activities, and the nature of club activities. Honkasalo (2013), for example, expressed concern that some girls-only clubs tended to promote static and often conservative and heteronormative views and activities, effectively normalizing a particular type of girlhood (Honkasalo, 2013). These points need to be taken into consideration in African research on such clubs.

Teenage pregnancy and motherhood

Gender-responsive schools support pregnant girls and adolescent mothers in continuing their schooling, and the process/stigma associated with re-entering school (Parkes & Heslop, 2013; Robinson, 2015). In their research on teen motherhood in secondary schools in the townships and suburbs of Cape Town, South Africa, Chigona and Chetty (2007) found that young women who had left school temporarily to have a baby and returned to school received insufficient support. Teen mothers faced the challenges of a lack of time to study and do homework; missed classes and irregular attendance because of childcare responsibilities; fear, loneliness and isolation at school; a lack of acceptance by some teachers and students; a lack of skills among school staff to handle teen mothers' situations; poverty; and a lack of counseling support to deal with the stigma attached to teen motherhood. Chigona and Chetty (2007) recommended stronger policies to counter discrimination and suggested that schools provide proper counseling services, daycare facilities, and better teacher training, and that teachers make lessons and time available to these young mothers.



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Menstrual hygiene management

Work in the area of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) takes up the relationship between menstruation and schooling at the intersection of WASH and education sectors. With the onset of menses in adolescence, providing girls with adequate support to properly manage menstruation plays an important role in supporting girls' access to and experiences in school. For example, survey research with 600 schools in northeast Ethiopia found that without proper menstrual hygiene and health support, girls reported high rates of absenteeism, declined school performance, and school dropout as a result of menstruation (Tegegne & Sisay, 2014). A gender-responsive school environment includes improving women and girls' safe access to sanitary products, toilets, water, soap, and adequate washing or sanitary disposal facilities to manage menstrual health. For example, efforts to improve girls' access to sanitary pads include the 2017 South African Department of Education decision to distribute free sanitary pads to girls, and the AFRIPads social enterprise project, which engages women to produce reusable menstrual pad for girls, with headquarters in Uganda, and offices in Kenya and Malawi.³¹ These infrastructural and planning considerations work to promote school environments that are more hygienic, inclusive, and supportive of both girls and women teachers. Girls' concerns and recommendations about how to improve the school environment need to be included in these efforts to address menstrual health in a girl-friendly way. Given the taboo nature of this topic, research suggests the need for sensitive approaches to menstrual literacy. For example, in Sommer's (2010) work with urban and rural girls in northern Tanzania's Kilimanjaro region, girls presented a number of pragmatic and realistic recommendations. When prompted to list how they would improve the school environment with an imaginary one hundred million shillings and a prompt to draw the perfect girls' toilet, girls suggested that schools buy sanitary pads and make them available to them, equip toilets with water supplied inside the latrines, functional door locks, and space to burn used pads, and that puberty be addressed at younger levels than current curriculum approaches suggest so that girls are more prepared and informed about menarche and its related changes.

Also contributing to a supportive school environment, comprehensive sexuality education includes access to information about menstruation. Research has found that girls often do not know very much about menstruation, are not prepared to effectively manage their menses at school, and therefore experience fear, shame, and discrimination related to their menstrual cycle—especially at the onset of menses that often occurs at a critical stage in girls' schooling (Sommer, 2010; Tegegne & Sisay, 2014). As part of Sommer's (2010) research in Tanzania, girls recommended the need for more access to published booklets and educational materials related to puberty and menstruation. This led to the idea of the Puberty Book described earlier in this review in relation to learning materials. Additionally, Marni Sommer identified that very little is known about the roles and views of teachers, principals, and administrators in supporting and improving MHM in schools (personal communication, 2017). There is a need for more research about how teachers and school leaders understand girls' menstrual health challenges, how MHM is taken up in teacher education and school curricula, and how to better support girls, teachers and a whole-school approach to MHM.

Addressing Disability

There is very little work done in the area of gender and disability. Girl-responsive, rights-based, and child-friendly approaches to schooling emphasize an inclusive approach that

³¹ <http://afripads.com/what-we-do/our-mission>



recognizes and addresses multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion from formal schooling. UNGEI's (2017) recent report, *Still Left Behind: Pathways to Inclusive Education for Girls With Disabilities* noted scant progress in the area of research into gender and disability. Part of the problem is that there is very little research that specifically investigates the experiences and needs of girls with disabilities. The UNGEI report noted, "Despite growing commitment to gender and disability inclusive education by governments, donors and (inter)national development organizations, there is still very little in the way of documentation and robust evidence on research and programs that address the intersectional marginalization of girls with disabilities in education" (p. 3). In a blog about this report, Nora Fyles (2017)³² wrote about the issues that girls with disabilities face.

Data on the experience of girls with disability is very limited, so knowledge is sketchy at best. What we do know is, like their non-disabled sisters, girls with disability face deep structures of gender inequality in school, in the family and in society in addition to negative social norms associated with disability. This leads to – among other issues – low expectations of their ability to make use of education; a higher risk of gender based violence in and around schools; and fewer opportunities than boys to occupy space and influence class discussions. While the lack of separate and functioning toilets presents a challenge to all adolescent girls, those with disability face additional hurdles where restrictive physical space and the lack of support makes the management of menstruation at school almost impossible. Misunderstanding and discrimination leads teachers and community members to perceive children with disability – and especially girls – as lacking intelligence and having limited chances to work. Less value is therefore placed on their education. In fact, families may hide girls with disability at home for fear and shame, and schools may refuse to accept them. (Section 2)

A key conclusion from the UNGEI report is the critical need for more targeted funding, increased collaboration between the education and disability sectors, as well as additional research, monitoring and evidence-building. Therefore, it should be noted that this section only begins to address gender and disability and emphasizes the paucity of research in this area.

A handful of studies about disability have been reviewed below, but these do not use a gender analysis. Regarding the education of blind and visually impaired students, a number of institutional supports and programs in Kenya support blind people. These include Kenya Society for the Blind, Kenya Union of the Blind, and Cristobel Mission and Kenya Institute of Special Education. In this context, research shows that support for students with visual impairments can vary widely.

At two specialized schools for learners with visual impairments, a survey by Njue, Njoroge and Chege (2014) research found limited support for student learning. Several teachers did not have adequate training in the specific tactile sensory and hand movement characteristics of Braille education. Additionally, schools lacked sufficient resources and facilities for teaching and learning Braille. There was a long time delay to process print materials into Braille, such that visually impaired students receiving learning materials long after sighted students. The authors deemed the slate and stylus Braille equipment to be cumbersome for young learners in particular because of the finger strength required to perforating the thick Braille paper, and the slate and stylus's left to right orientation. The authors recommended the Perkins Brailler, although noting

³² <http://blog.ungei.org/still-left-behind/>



the need for donors given its cost. Also, the chairs were too low for effective Braille learning because students had to raise their hands up near shoulder level to navigate the reading materials.

At Kenyatta University, Oranga, Chege and Kabutha (2013) conducted biographical interviews with ten undergraduate and graduate students (5 women, 5 men) with visual impairments to examine their experiences in transitioning to university. In terms of challenges, students faced stigma, negative expectations, social exclusion, and their parents' low levels of education. To cope with these challenges, students relied on certain strategies: 1) Building friendships with peers offered moral support, volunteers to read printed texts, and healthy academic discussions that enhanced understanding and academic achievements; 2) Demystifying their disabilities by sensitizing others and defending themselves against exclusion; 3) Seeking guidance and counseling services to build courage, strength and confidence to address stigma without detracting from their studies; 4) Striving to do well academically and be as independent as possible by countering the low expectations of others and showcasing their worth, value and potential; 5) Believing in, asserting, and advocating for themselves, in particular when students lacked support from their families; and 6) Accepting monthly financial contributions from teachers and other sponsors, to help with the costs of small items such as transportation, soap, and shoe polish. Notably, blind students found that sighted students were initially afraid that they might become assistants, and resentful, suggesting the need for more general awareness-raising amongst student populations.

Regarding inclusion, exclusion, and empowerment in the development of gender-responsive and child-friendly school environments, albinism requires particular consideration. A relatively common genetic condition in sub-Saharan Africa, oculocutaneous albinism involves reduced melanin synthesis leaving little to no pigmentation in hair, eyes, and skin (Lund, 2001). Albinism is associated with a number of physical health issues related to skin and vision, such that learners have specific needs that include certain teaching and learning materials, particular pedagogical practices, and adaptation to the physical school and classroom environment. In many contexts, considerable stigma, misinformation, and cultural myths about albinism lead to social exclusion, discrimination, and, at times, targeted violence. This indicates the need for increased awareness and education among both health care providers and members of the public about the genetic cause of albinism.

In Zimbabwe, Lund's (2001) survey of 138 children (aged 9 to 21) with oculocutaneous albinism attending rural primary and secondary schools found children's main challenge was related to vision. This challenge included not being able to see the blackboard and printed materials such as textbooks, challenges exacerbated by bright sun shining into classrooms. Pedagogical strategies that supported pupils' needs included have them sit close to the blackboard, giving them large print materials and extra time to complete work, having them not need to share books with classmates, and giving them financial support for tuition. A minority of students in the study reported social discrimination, and many described the strong levels of support they received from their siblings (47 percent also had a sibling with albinism). Of crucial significance is that 50 percent of these students did not know the reason for their condition, and many held common misconceptions about the cause of it. Students had many, many questions, which indicates a significant lack of and need for more widely available information about both the genetic and health care aspects of albinism.

At a special primary school in rural South Africa, Lund and Gaigher (2002) surveyed 38 children with albinism in Grade 5 (aged 11 to 16). This school draws students with visual impairments from rural areas and is well resourced with a disabilities officer and nurse on site,



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one of only a few such schools in South Africa. Students' main concerns related to vision and skin problems. To address students' needs, a number of strategies were implemented at the school, including having shutters on the windows, covered walkways and trees in the schoolyard to reduce glare from the sun, mobile blackboards on wheels in each classroom that could be moved around depending on lighting in the room at different times of day, and enabling children to walk up to the blackboard during lessons. 82 percent of respondents in this study felt they received special treatment in a positive way that supported their learning, citing the benefits of large-print books and support from the nurse at school about how to protect their skin from the sun. While the study did not explicitly report on gender, the authors made an observational note that boys were at increased risk of ultra-violet exposure because they tended to spend their free time playing football outside in the sun, while girls' tended to choose indoor leisure activities. In this study, 79 percent of students did not know the cause of albinism, and 87 percent felt that people with albinism had fewer friends than others. Making information about albinism more widely available could help to address stigma and discrimination. The authors concluded a need for holistic, whole-child approaches that bring together young people, families, schools, communities, and health professionals (Lund & Gaigher, 2002).

People with disabilities, in particular women and girls, are at greater risk of HIV because such people are more likely to be marginalized, poorer and underemployed; they receive less education, in general; receive less information about sexual health in particular given common assumptions about people with disabilities as being asexual; and are at increased risk of sexual violence and abuse (Rohleder, 2010). Lastly, many visual and media-based HIV campaigns are not accessible for many people with certain disabilities (Rohleder, 2010).

According to the UNGEI (2017) report, most of the work about gender and disability is conducted by organizations. Nora Fyles (2017)³³ presented an overview of some programs.

Across the 20 organizations in our study, certain features were common, including community sensitisation on gender and disability, child protection mechanisms and teacher training. In Kenya, Leonard Cheshire Disability is employing Community Resource Workers as advocates working directly with schools, families and communities, building good relationships with families to assuage their fears concerning the safety of their daughters. In Sierra Leone, AbleChild Africa uses a child-to-child approach, and in Uganda, Sightsavers employs radio appeals to promote the participation of girls and young women in school and skills training. Plan International seeks to address School Related Gender Based Violence by strengthening child protection measures, with trained Volunteer Child Officers and school based counselling departments. A Child Helpline in Uganda, and accessible complaint boxes with community feedback mechanisms in Sierra Leone, also aim to counter bullying and School Related Gender Based Violence. Other agencies focused on strengthening teachers with skills and material for inclusive and gender sensitive teaching and learning. (Section 3)

Additionally, the following toolkits offer specific examples and activities for addressing disability and gender equitable strategies.

³³ <http://blog.ungei.org/still-left-behind/>



Childfund International and Women's Refugee Commission. (2016). *Gender-based violence against children and youth with disabilities: A toolkit for child protection actors*.

Richmond: ChildFund International. (This toolkit was developed and piloted in Ethiopia)

RTI International. (2015c). *A guide for strengthening gender equality and inclusiveness in teaching and learning materials*. Washington, D.C.: USAID.

However, to address gender and disability in education in a more substantial way, more research is needed. A more comprehensive literature search strategy could include more specific search terms such as disability, special needs, visual impairment, blind education, deaf education, braille, sign language, wheelchair. For example, in their brief overview of the history of deaf education in sub-Saharan Africa, Kiyaga and Moores (2003) noted that deaf women face triple discrimination, but there is little robust evidence about the nature of these experiences. In sum, very little is written about how gender intersects with disability in the specific context of literacy. Much additional research is needed.

Family and Community Involvement in Schools

A gender-responsive, child-friendly whole-school approach includes significant community involvement in several dimensions of schooling.

First, it is critical to engage families and communities in the operations and decision-making related to schooling. This means involving the community and parents in the management of schools, recruitment of teachers, and the decision-making in the education process (UNFPA, 2016). Having families participate on governance boards helps develop better relationships and communication between families and schools.

Second, it is also critical to work with families and communities more broadly on the value of a gender perspective, and the need to address norms and beliefs about child-rearing (Parkes & Heslop, 2013). In a policy brief about SRGBV emerging from two gender violence projects (a UNICEF intervention in Cote d'Ivoire, Togo, Zambia, and Ethiopia, as well as the ActionAid project in Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique), Heslop (2016) provided evidence that the following strategies are effective for addressing and reducing SRGBV with families and communities.

Dialogue around gender, power and sexual agency: School violence is more than a child protection issue and interventions need to engage young people, schools, families, and communities in dialogue about gender norms and sexuality.

Working with multiple stakeholders in the school, wider community and across sectors: With a focus on girls' empowerment, girls are often tasked with the responsibility for creating change with regard to gender violence and inequality. The wider communities around girls also need to be involved with the responsibility for change. This is crucial for reinforcing direct interventions with girls and boys. For example:

- Creating different opportunities for dialogue with families, including reflect circles, home-school discussions, and home visits (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).
- Inviting community response through teacher-led participatory curriculum development groups with students, families, community members, and NGOs (Heslop, 2016).
- Building partnerships between schools and community organizations, but in particular with women's groups and child rights organizations to strengthen and support



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interventions and facilitate different types of gender discussions in different sites (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).

- Community Advocacy Teams and networks of local activists create an important link between communities and formal justice systems (Parkes et al., 2013).
- Engaging traditional and religious leaders (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).

Gender transformative approaches: In addressing values and beliefs, gender transformative pedagogies that involve reflection and consciousness raising about how gender inequalities shape violence are particularly effective. This means creating safe spaces for deep personal reflection, dialogue, and learning aimed at developing awareness about gender norms as part of a structure of power, rather than seeing these as taken for granted or natural characteristics. Importantly, boys and men need to reflect on norms about dominant masculinities, and create different visions of what it means to be men (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).

A collaborative rather than a combative approach: Sometimes interventions are seen to critique what is thought of as culture and intervenors can experience backlash from community members. The goal should be to work with, not against cultural and/or religious teachings in order to avoid the risk of driving the cultural practices underground (Parkes & Heslop, 2013). This is particularly critical when addressing issues such as sexuality, child marriage, FGM and alternative rites.

Addressing the structural drivers of sexual violence: This includes considering economic independence and empowerment through access to income-generation opportunities and attention to the financial literacy of women and girls.

Work with the media: The media tends to sensationalize violence and reinscribe gender norms. There is broad potential to work with journalists and editors to create more gender transformative forms of media reporting. Bringing together literature on gender and education from Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo in West Africa, Tuwor and Sossou (2008) considered the importance of mass media education campaigns and the dissemination of information to better promote the importance and economic implications of girls' education.

Coordination across community institutions and services: Coordinated support for gender equality across health clinics, hospitals, police and legal services is needed.

It should be noted that facilitation plays a critical role in many of these interventions. Heslop (2016) suggested that the use of skilled external facilitators can be important to establish participatory spaces.

Examples of School Models



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The Good School Toolkit, Uganda

The Good School Toolkit (2011) is an intervention methodology developed by the NGO, Raising Voices, in Uganda.³⁴ This approach has three objectives with an aim to transform schools and create a violence-free learning environment:

- 1) To equip **teachers** for increasing student confidence and success;
- 2) To create a **learning environment** that is safe and respectful; and
- 3) To support the **administration** in becoming more transparent and accountable.

Designed and tested with the involvement of teachers, students, and administrative leaders in Uganda, the approach involves six steps, easy-to follow instructions, monitoring checklists, and ready-made materials designed to be implemented over the course of approximately two years.

The Good School Toolkit is one of the few intervention models that has been tested using a randomized control trial. In this study by Devries et al (2015), 21 primary schools in Uganda implemented the Good School Toolkit for a period of 20 months, while 21 control schools were waitlisted. Using an international student self-report survey, this assessment found the Good School approach to be effective at reducing physical violence in schools with 31 percent of randomly selected students from intervention schools reporting past week physical violence from school staff as compared with 49 percent of students from control schools. While neither the Good School Toolkit nor the follow-up study takes a gender approach, this model might offer an effective model for taking up GBV in schools.

FAWE Centers of Excellence

FAWE has developed a gender-responsive holistic model for schooling that supports girls' education and gender equality. Since 1999, FAWE has established 19 Centers of Excellence in Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Namibia, Rwanda, and Tanzania, and is also working to transform additional government schools into Centers of Excellence in Benin, Comoros, Madagascar, Swaziland, Togo, Uganda, Zambia, and Zanzibar. FAWE Centers of Excellence take up the following strategies:

- Gender-responsive school management training for school directors and head teachers;
- Gender-responsive pedagogy training for teachers;
- Science, Mathematics and Technology program for girls;
- Bursaries for underprivileged girls;
- Empowerment training for girls and boys;
- Sexual maturation management program targeting girls;
- Gender-responsive school infrastructure; and
- Community involvement in school management.

Umutende School, Zambia

An alternative private secondary school in Zambia, the Umutende School was established based on a peace and social justice model, in 1992 by two retired teachers. Compared with public government schools, Bajaj (2009) noted several unique features of the Umutende School, including its being a smaller school (500 students compared with 1000 to 2000), a longer school

³⁴ <http://raisingvoices.org/good-school/>



day (10 hours, compared to two 5 to 6 hour shifts), and daily whole-school assemblies in the local language focused on leadership, values, human rights, and social issues.

Three significant features supported gender equality and girls' education. First, the school uses a single sex model with separate campuses for girls and for boys (separate classrooms, facilities, teachers, and leadership structure). On the girls' campus, girls' participate in the morning assemblies in ways that challenge women's traditional roles in the public sphere by singing and drumming, as well as doing announcements and role-plays. Second, all students are expected to perform school cleaning activities, without gendered divisions of labor. This labor is mandatory and a regular part of the school schedule, and is coupled with explicit formal instruction about gender roles. Several parents noted how these responsibilities carried over into the home environment, particularly for boys, who took on work that is typically considered women's work, including sweeping, washing dishes, and doing laundry. Third, as a result of the explicit school focus on social justice, students from the Umutende School were surveyed to have greater knowledge of human rights violations against women as compared with students in government schools. Bajaj (2009) noted questions about sustainability and replicability of this model in larger, publicly funded schools, as well as girls' efficacy for renegotiating gender outside the classroom.

Community Schools Initiative, Egypt

The Community Schools Initiative in Egypt is celebrated as an effective form of intervention for working with communities to reach out-of-school girls in rural areas. UNICEF (2003) summarized this project as follows:

Since 1992, UNICEF has supported the Community Schools Initiative in Egypt, working in partnership with the Ministry of Education, NGOs and communities. The aim is to provide quality education for children living in small, rural hamlets in Upper Egypt where primary schools were previously non-existent and rural girls were particularly deprived (net enrolment rates for rural girls range from 50%-70%, compared with 90% nationally). Currently, the 200 community schools established by the project have reached some 8,000 children – 70% girls. Local ownership is a key feature of the project, with communities donating space, ensuring that children come to class, and managing the schools through a local education committee established in each hamlet. Young women with intermediate degrees are recruited locally and trained as facilitators to provide quality education through inter-active techniques and the content of education is made relevant to local needs and interests, including health, environment, agriculture, and local history. Graduates from community schools are eligible for exams in government schools at the end of grades 3 and 6. (p. 3)

Zaalouk (2004) highlighted the effectiveness of this intervention beyond a project-based approach and investigates this initiative as a form of social movement, involving collective and context-responsive action for change.

Gender and boarding facilities

In an advocacy brief about reaching rural and remote girls, Bista and Cosstick (2005) focused exclusively on boarding schools. Here the term includes residential schooling, feeder hostels, and schools with dormitory facilities (often on campus), and that often also have accommodation for teaching and support staff. While private boarding schools in many areas of the world serve the children of affluent families, Bista and Cosstick define boarding schools as



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Institutions supported by the state that are created specifically for the purpose of providing both academic programmes and housing for children. Particular attention under such as scheme is often given to those groups who otherwise may not have access to school at all: girls, those coming from rural and remote areas, and those living in difficult circumstances. (p. 1)

Many countries in Africa have a long tradition of boarding schools dating back to colonial times, in particular at the secondary level in countries that were at one time colonized by the British. In Ghana, for example, 80 percent of all schools are boarding schools (Bista & Cosstick, 2005). Boarding schools play a particularly important role in secondary education since a number of African governments subsidize student meals at public boarding schools. In an advocacy brief assessing the implications of boarding schools for reaching girls from rural and remote areas, Bista and Cosstick (2005) suggested some of the potential advantages to include: promoting access to schooling; improving the enrollment, retention, and academic performance of girls; protecting girls in emergency situations; and integrating girls from poor or minority communities within mainstream society. However, Bista and Cosstick also noted some potential disadvantages of boarding schools including increased risks of cultural hegemony, feelings of alienation, physical and sexual abuse, and pregnancy. This advocacy brief noted the important role of funding and how boarding schools are managed as critical determinants of the advantages and disadvantages listed above. Given the prevalence of boarding schools in sub-Saharan Africa, there is a need for more rigorous research to evaluate girls' experience and the gendered nature of boarding schools in a changing policy environment.

Awards and Scholarships

To support girls' access to education, research suggests making girls' schooling more affordable for families through conditional cash transfers, scholarships, and stipends (UNFPA, 2016; Unterhalter et al., 2014).

Awards also play an important role in recognizing and rewarding existing initiatives, and creating motivation for continued work. Mwatha and Chege (2011) stressed the importance of awards for celebrating programs and organizations that effectively support gender equality and girls' education. Examples include the following:

Agathe Uwilingiyimana Award: This award in East and West Africa commemorates the Rwandan Prime Minister Agathe Uwilingiyimana who was a founding member of FAWE. Award-winning organizations include: The Uganda Rural Development Training Program (Uganda); St. Elisa Pre-nursing School (Uganda); Zambian Open Community Schools (Zambia); and Materi Girl's Centre (Kenya).

The FAWE Award for Media Excellence: This award emerged from recommendations at a Media Workshop associated with a FAWE General Assembly, and marks the importance of the media in supporting and promoting women and girls. The award distinguishes journalists who consistently address issues related to women's development and girls' education.

What about the Boys?

Limited research explores boys' literacy practices, and education more generally. Around the world, girls typically rank relatively higher than boys in the area of literacy, particularly in earlier years of schooling. USAID's recent report, *Boys' Underachievement in Education: A Review of the Literature With a Focus on Reading in the Early Years*, explores this global phenomenon (RTI International, 2016). This report attributes boys' underachievement primarily



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to a disjuncture between social expectations and stereotypes related to dominant masculinities and the structure and content of typical school systems. Yet this report echoes the work of Gemma Moss (2007) who explored the relationship between gender, literacy, and attainment in the context of the UK, and drew attention to a paradox between, on the one hand, gender hierarchies that are firmly entrenched in the culture of schooling that position boys and masculinities as more powerful, and on the other, boys' under-achievements in literacy and educational achievements. The USAID report emphasized that simple solutions such as boy-friendly texts, single-sex classrooms, and male teachers are not sufficient and may inadvertently reinforce dominant masculinities (RTI International, 2016). Therefore, it is critical to develop targeted strategies that both address boys' underperformance and girls' participation as well as social power more generally as it relates to gender, and other forms of social difference.

As remarked earlier in relation to literacy achievements, the evidence from various countries in Africa presents more mixed results, with stronger correlations between literacy achievements and wealth and location. Further, boys continue to complete more years of formal schooling than do girls. However, there are certainly instances when girls outperform boys, leaving questions about what is happening with boys in education. This conundrum is not widely documented in the research on gender and literacy in Africa that has focused largely on improving girls' access to and completion of schooling. Emerging trends—particularly with increased academic achievements of girls in urban areas—suggest the need to establish a careful nuanced approach that pushes beyond the broad girls versus boys rhetoric, and that maps the roles of particular sociocultural, socioeconomic, and institutional contexts in shaping the relationships between gender and literacy achievement.

In the context of girls' education projects in Kenya, Fatuma Chege and colleagues have studied emerging trends of boys' underperformance in schooling (Chege & Likoye, 2015; Chege, Likoye, Nyambura, & Guantai, 2013; Chege & Sakurai, 2011). Using a feminist gender framework that includes the experiences of boys and men, this body of research explored the role of schools in the construction of gendered identities, with a particular focus on the implications for masculinities.

Teachers

One reason for the downtrend in boys' performance in schools connects with the increasing feminization of schooling in Kenya, or what Chege et al. (2013) termed the e-masculinisation of schooling. Many schools have increasingly female-dominated teaching staff. Women teachers and administrators in Kenya reported dedicating concerted support to advance learning and self-esteem for girls. This trend supports the idea that women teachers play a critical role as role models and support systems for girls, thus improving girls' schooling experiences. However, gender disparities in the distribution of teaching staff also have gendered impacts because all students need role models that reflect their gender identities. In the push to support girls, several women teachers admitted inadvertently neglecting to attend to the specific needs of boys. Furthermore, this research found that male teachers take what they describe as a more laid back approach, which made them seem less interested in developing connections with or mentoring boys (or girls, for that matter). Chege and Likoye (2015) wrote,

Male teachers in the school needed to be empowered with skills on how to guide and counsel boys on matters of schooling as well as on matters of becoming men in the same way that the female teachers did with the girls.... (p. 11)



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Approachable school-based mentors are critical for both boys and girls and there is a continued need for gender awareness training in both pre-service and in-service teacher education.

Access to work

A second area influencing boys' lack of motivation to attend and complete school center around social expectations related to masculinities, and the pressure for men to earn income and support their families (Chege & Likoye, 2015; Chege et al., 2013). Many boys could not identify how academic achievement would increase their income-earning capacities or promise of being successful men. In short, men's wealth and success is not necessarily linked to schooling. As such, many boys become disillusioned or disenchanted with schooling and opt to leave school for employment opportunities. The notion of learning to labor offered a more attractive model of masculinities and success. This work varied depending on the area, but included driving motorcycles or pushcarts in the transportation business, carrying out petty trading, and working in the agricultural sector on rice paddies. Regardless of the sector, boys' labor is considered desirable because it costs less than adult labor, and is deemed easier to control and exploit. Additionally, boys in Nairobi were more likely to engage in leisure activities (such as watching TV, and playing video games and pool) that distracted them from their studies. This suggests the need for more attention to the transition from schooling to career opportunities, motivational talks for boys, and for schools to construct more promising models of masculinities.

Family return on investment

Lastly, these studies found families increasingly prioritizing investing in girls' education because they found their daughters more likely than their sons to care for and support them financially in their older years (Chege & Likoye, 2015). Investing in boys' education did not guarantee the same kind of support and financial security for the family. Families often provided boys with less financial support than girls, leaving boys more economically independent at a younger age thus reinforcing boys' motivations to prioritize employment over school (Chege & Likoye, 2015). Additionally, in situations of unwanted pregnancies, boys' education can also be affected. In Ethiopia, women report that many boys leave school and run away to other cities and towns to avoid the repercussions from both their own and the girl's family, some ending up living on the street (Alemu, 2010).

Boyhood and masculinity

The relationship between boyhood, masculinities, and literacies remains critically understudied. In South Africa, boys from particular ethnic groups miss one entire term of formal schooling (including at critical examination times) to attend traditional initiation schools in the mountains (Naidoo & Perumal, 2014). Other areas for more research might include boys, literacy, and Islamic education.

Many have argued that boys and men also need to play an important role in addressing gender equality and violence.

Ideas about manhood are deeply ingrained. From an early age, boys may be socialized into gender roles designed to keep men in power and in control. Many are conditioned to believe that dominant behavior towards girls and women is part of being a man. (UNFPA, 2016, p. 75)

An ActionAid project in Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique found that primary school boys' clubs showed promise in addressing gender violence and norms about masculinity.



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However there is the need for more research about boys' experiences of violence and a critical analysis of what it means to be a boy or a man (Parkes & Heslop, 2013).

Ngidi and Moletsane's (2016) pilot initiative with 16 peer educators in South Africa found that facilitating men's discussions about their experiences as perpetrators, victims, and witnesses of violence was a critical factor in developing an effective gender violence prevention curriculum. Notably, of the eight male peer educators (secondary school and university students), four had experienced some form of sexual abuse, including that perpetrated by male family members, and gang rape on the street. Additionally, all eight young men had perpetrated, collaborated in, or supported acts of gender violence. These young men identified the need for safer spaces for men to report and discuss violence.

Exploring how gender, literacy, and educational achievement intertwine in the context of the UK, Moss (2007) queried whether it was appropriate or helpful to borrow from early feminist explanations for the under achievements of girls in education to explain the contemporary under achievements of boys. Moss framed this problem as being how to account for and remedy the underperformance of boys in ways or terms that do not undermine or jeopardize the successes of girls. So little research investigates the social factors influencing from a gender perspective what it means to read or be a reader. Exploring the factors that produce girls and boys as readers, Moss points to the role of identity, the role of the curriculum (in constructing gender differentiated outcomes, and different versions of literacies in schools), and the need for new ways of remaking masculinities.

Section Discussion

School cultures are very complex, and this section has considered some of the different ways in which gender plays a significant role in shaping the school environment. Certainly, each topic included in the school environment could be developed as an entire area of study in and of itself. While the area of SRGBV seems to be the best-developed, there is a dire scarcity of peer-reviewed research in the areas of gender and school governance, the use of clubs as interventions to address gender, gender and disability, and masculinities and boys' education. Additionally, as suggested earlier, it might also be fruitful to explore what it means to bring two or three areas together, such as the provision of safe toilets and MHM, or school leadership and women teachers. As the field of gender and educational quality develops, many of these areas are expected to gain increased scholarly attention.

Perhaps most critical in all of this work is the ongoing need for gender and literacy research that strives to involve the girls, boys, women and men who are the most affected by decisions about educational policy and practice in discussions about the implications of the school environment, and language and literacy learning more generally. To conclude, Heather Switzer (forthcoming, 2018) offers the following note about critical hope, based on her work with Maasai communities in the area of girls' education in Kenya.

Education is a central process, and school a key site through which Maasai communities struggle to imagine and craft their futures. I listened as Maasai schoolgirls shared stories describing the obstacles they faced in their pursuit of schooling and their worries about the future, and many expressed frustration, fear, and even pain. But they also expressed something else: pointed, provocative hope and a particular knowledge about who they are and who they want to be. (n.p.)



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LOOKING AHEAD AND BEYOND

This review has focused on the gendered aspects of language and literacy teaching and learning, with a specific focus on the policies, practices, pedagogies, and materials specifically relevant to addressing gender empowerment in the school environment. However, many other important areas related to gender and literacy are beyond the scope of the review, but point to the need for additional work. These additional areas mark both the limitations of this review and also suggest areas that could be considered for future research.

Reaching Out-of-School Populations

While originally drafted as a major section of this review, the area of literacy and reaching out-of-school populations has produced scarce peer-review research. This is troublesome given how global progress at achieving EFA has reached a standstill, with sub-Saharan Africa presenting some of the most disconcerting statistics. More than half of all out-of-school children (OOSC) live in sub-Saharan Africa (SDG 4). While school enrolment progress is ongoing, it is difficult to keep up with population growth and the number of OOSC rose from 29 to 31 million children between 2008 and 2010 (UNESCO, 2012b). Certainly, there is enormous diversity within each country and region (see UNICEF and UIS regional reports from Eastern and Southern Africa (2014a) and West and Central Africa (2014b)). Nigeria and Ethiopia stand out with particularly high proportions of OOSC, with 10.5 and 2.4 million (42 percent and 18 percent) primary school-aged children out-of-school, respectively in 2010 (UNESCO, 2012b). The magnitude of this issue in Africa and the stalled progress represent significant challenges.

Part of the challenge is a gross lack of data about OOSC (UNICEF & UIS, 2014a, 2014b). In 2010, UNICEF and UIS launched the *Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children* with a goal “to achieve a breakthrough in reducing the number of out-of-school children” (2011, p. 1). This initiative has two specific objectives primarily in relation to the lack of data about OOSC: 1) improving statistical information and analysis, and 2) identifying bottlenecks and assessing existing interventions. Likely, the challenges reaching OOSC are connected with the systemic challenges related to doing research with young people living in remote, nomadic or pastoralist marginalized communities, or being in crisis in refugee or internal displacement situations. An estimated half of primary-school aged OOSC live in conflict-affected areas (see SDG 4).

To date, most efforts regarding what it means to address language and literacy learning with OOSC involves questions about how to improve children’s access and completion of schooling. For example, to reach nomadic or pastoralist populations, dominant approaches involve altering the structure of content of existing formal schooling to better accommodate the learning needs of nomadic or pastoralist children, moving children to schools (through for example residential or boarding types of schooling arrangements, hostels, or rescue centers for girls), or moving schools to children (through for example tree shade or mobile schools) (see de Souza, 2007; PACT Ethiopia, 2008). Distance learning, mobile literacy learning and radio programs are also significant here. For example, Lefoka (2007) describes some of the challenges of a distance learning program for reaching pastoralist boys in Lesotho. However, it is difficult to find a robust body of literature that reports on the gendered dimensions of such interventions in relation to literacy and language learning. Many strategies for reaching OOSC seem to position literacy learning implicitly as a predominantly school-based activity. It might be that expanded



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frameworks such as multiliteracies, and greater attention to out-of-school literacies (see for example Hull and Schultz's (2002) edited collection that investigates out-of-school literacy practices) could be helpful here. NGO programs and initiatives in the area of disability and distance learning education might also play an important role in framing research in this area.

Women and Community

With a focus on gender and literacy in the context of formal schooling, this review leaves questions about women and community. There is also a need to consider the wider contexts in which schools are located, and how gender norms and literacy practices outside the school environment also influence gender empowerment and what happens in schools. This includes a wider consideration of young people's social connectedness, family dynamics, out-of-school relationships, self-esteem, and access to services and resources. Here it would be helpful to explore the literacy practices of girls and boys in relation to the literacy practices of the women and men in their lives. Critically, the rich areas of women's and adult literacy were not included in this review, pointing to the need to consider the foundational work of Anna Robinson-Pant (2001, 2004, 2016), Nelly Stromquist and others who work in developing contexts, as well as those who study gender and literacy in the Global North. For example, Jenny Horsman's (2000b) study about women and literacy in Canada, *Something in my Mind Besides the Everyday*, offers insight about the ways in which dominant discourses about literacy shape women's literacy experiences. It could be fruitful to explore the implications of girls' empowerment through language and literacy in relation to women's literacies and family literacies.

Women Researchers

Strengthening gender and literacy research in higher education (HE) in Africa, while critical, was not included in this review. Atanga, Ellece, Litosseliti, and Sunderland (2012) linked the dearth of research about gender and language in Africa to the gendered structural challenges of African women researchers. They suggest the need for greater attention to be paid to supporting women researchers and strengthening opportunities for gender research capacity more generally. In a regional context of a plethora of policy initiatives and commitments aiming to mainstream gender, FAWE (2011) noted a disconnect within HE: "The majority of African universities still struggle in the area of gender research, while African governments face the practical challenges of adopting gender-responsive approaches to education" (p. 14). Higher education institutions (HEIs) (including universities, colleges, and teacher education centers) play a critical role integrating gender, supporting more women, and generating research about gender. Yet, as Amina Mama (2003, 2007) and others have highlighted, HEIs often have deeply gendered institutional cultures that limit the extent to which women are supported as faculty, and the extent to which gender is addressed in either research or teaching. Indeed, very few women were found to hold faculty positions in teacher education institutions in Ethiopia (Eshete, 2003).

To support research on and by African women, FAWE (2011) launched an initiative, *Strengthening Gender Research to Improve Girls' and Women's Education in Africa*, with a two-pronged strategy that includes developing networks and partnerships in order to bring together organizations working in the area of gender, and build and strengthen networks of gender researchers and activists across the African continent; and mentoring new gender scholars in data collection, analysis, report writing, and results dissemination in order to "build research capacity among African women on gender in education in Africa and encourage more women into the research field" (FAWE, 2011, p. 4). Supporting women researchers, and the development of



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more widespread gender analysis more generally, is critical to the development of meaningful, context-specific evidence about gender and literacy.

PART B: RECOMMENDATION AREAS FOR A GENDER AND LITERACY RESEARCH AGENDA

As this review has highlighted, the area of girls' empowerment and literacy is a complicated one. Clearly, there has been a vast body of work carried out on girls' education, and especially in relation to the supply side (curriculum, teachers, materials, school support and so on) and increasingly in relation to determining what works when it comes to getting and keeping girls in school. Somewhat surprisingly, especially given the links between numeracy and literacy and quality schooling, there remains something of a research gap in the area of gender and literacy. Although a number of promising areas have been identified and in some cases implemented (e.g. girls' education policies, whole-school approaches, school clubs, and gender-responsive pedagogies and learning materials), many of these interventions have not been researched in detail. Given the increased attention to the idea of girls' and women's empowerment at the global level, and given the significance of literacy in relation to empowerment, it seems obvious that there is a need for more nuanced research in these areas. What then are some promising areas and approaches for a gender and literacy research agenda?

Methodologically, quantitative tools play a critical role in establishing and examining broad patterns and trends of gender inequalities. This is important quantifying and addressing gender disparities in access, retention, and completion in schooling, literacy achievements, as well as amongst school staff and leadership, for example. When it comes to exploring gender and literacy practices, many have noted the importance and strength of qualitative, ethnographic, and participatory approaches to research for understanding literacy uses, meanings, and practices. These methodologies can be helpful for particularizing and contextualizing literacy practices, events, and learning in people's everyday lives. Qualitative, ethnographic, and participatory approaches to research are also important for studying the complicated and sometimes contradictory nature of gendered identities and relations.

Research Area 1: Gender, Literacy, and the Policy Environment

Rationale: In recent decades, many countries have established, through gender mainstreaming, sophisticated gender machinery, including women's and gender ministries, gender focal people, and numerous laws and policies that aim to promote gender equality. Particularly, many countries have developed national strategies for girls' education. Research needs to explore how these policies and structures are enacted in practice. What difference does this policy environment make in literacy learning? What factors influence how policies are operationalized in the education sector, and in school environments? Who is involved in gender work, and what capacities and resources are required? In classrooms and schools, how does the policy environment shape literacy practices and efforts to address gender norms? What are the challenges with policy implementation, but, also, what are the successes and opportunities? How do girls' education strategies compare, both in theory and in practice? And what do girls and women have to say about these strategies?

Promising approaches: These include the work of Unterhalter et al. (2010) that explores the views of teachers, school administrators, government officials, and NGOs about gender



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policies and Jones's (2011) assessment of the Ugandan National Strategy for Girls' Education in relation to the learning needs expressed by secondary school girls. Promising approaches also include research that explores participatory engagement with policy, both in terms of speaking back to policy (Mitchell & de Lange, 2013), reflective mapping with teachers about where policy comes from (Mitchell et al., 1999), but also facilitating participatory from-the-ground-up policy-making processes (see, too, work by the Center for Visual Methodologies and Social Change at the University of KwaZulu-Natal).

Research Area 2: The Literacy Practices of Girls and Boys in School and Beyond

Rationale: Given the need for teaching and learning to acknowledge and build on existing literacy practices, it is surprising how little has been documented about the gendered nature of young people's literacy practices. There is a "crucial need for international research that accounts for a broader range of global contexts, particularly economically under-resourced contexts such as sub-Saharan Africa, which are extremely under-researched and under-represented in new literacies research" (Kendrick, Chemjor, & Early, 2012, p. 298). This suggests the need to develop more nuanced understandings of literacy beyond reading achievement test scores. How do young people engage with literacy? What are the different reading and writing practices of girls and boys? What are young people's genre preferences and how and why do these develop? How do these differ inside and outside classrooms, and across community boundaries? As Gemma Moss asked, whose literacy events are being studied, and "what counts as literacy, *here?*" (p. 46, italics added). What is the meaning of new and multiliteracies in young people's lives? "What can we learn from innovative, from-the-ground-up localized use of technologies that are based on the needs of specific communities?" (Sanya & Odero, 2017, p. 4). In what ways do different types of literacies shape social transformation and empowerment?

Exploring literacy as a dynamic social practice can deepen the analytical space to understand the ways in which literacy practices are gendered. In what ways is gender expressed and produced through literacy? Given the diverse and often competing depictions of gender across different pedagogical and social sites, how do girls and boys internalize, resist, or negotiate those competing narratives? What modes seem to play a more influential role in shaping girls' and boys' sense of self? Here, questions about genre, identity, language, and intertextuality might offer starting points for exploring more deeply how young people engage with and produce various forms of text. Lastly, what about gender, literacy, and libraries? How might a gender lens advance gender-responsive libraries and library programs?

Promising approaches: These include the ethnographic study of girls' and boys' reading and writing practices across different contexts, such as Mattos's (2013) study of a girls' reading for pleasure club in South Africa; and the gender analysis of Unterhalter et al. (2004) and Moletsane (2000, 2005) of a writing competition, also in South Africa. There is also space for combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies, such as Kate Parry's (2004) work exploring community library lending patterns in Uganda (tracing what girls and boys borrow, and how girls and boys use these texts in their families and communities) and reader engagement with texts through book reports. Working with the idea that literacy is social practice, Gemma Moss (2007) has recommended *literacy events* as methodological tools for the ethnographic study of literacies at both home and school. Here, literacy events offer particular moments that are bounded in time, such as reading aloud in class, reading a bedtime story, or reading a bus timetable, as units of analysis. This approach moves beyond the assessment of literacy skills to



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documenting the relationship between texts, contexts, and readers. The study of literacy events can bring into focus the broader social trends related to how people think about literacy, the social expectations and meanings related to literacy, and what people actually do with literacy.

Research Area 3: Gender and Reading Materials

Rationale: Although there are some studies that have sought to identify specific reading and viewing content that focuses on issues of gender (e.g. Balfour, 2003; Ngcobo, 2012, 2015, 2016) and that ensures the appropriateness of the texts in gender-responsive teaching, there are opportunities to deepen research in this area. A small but growing number of studies draw attention to the significance of embedding issues of gender and empowerment in literacy experiences in non-fiction (for example in Puberty Readers and textbooks), media and literature (such as popular film and folk stories) and in narratives produced by young people themselves (e.g. *In My Life: Stories and Poems* (see Mitchell, 2006)). This remains an understudied area. What difference does this make? How might reading material, especially for upper primary and secondary school students more consciously focus on themes and issues that are relevant to social change? What would the response of the readers look like? In what ways is gender taken up within publishing and materials development?

Promising approaches: These include reader response research and engagement with texts combined with a textual analysis of various texts themselves (textbooks, children's storybooks, young adult literature), such as the work of Balfour (2003), Ngcobo (2012, 2015, 2016), Smith (2000), Smith and Mitchell (2001) in South Africa and Thomas and Rugambwa (2011) in Tanzania. Research about gender and reading materials could draw fruitfully on the work being done by book projects aiming to provide culturally appropriate books in African languages.

Research Area 4: Gender, Literacy, and Teacher Education

Rationale: As numerous studies have highlighted, the role of teachers cannot be minimized and in rural areas, it may be the teacher who is the main literate person. To date few studies have focused on what is happening in teacher education, and the ways in which girls' and women's empowerment might be explored. What do we know of gender and the literacy practices of pre-service teachers? What about in-service teachers? What kinds of programs could support pre-service teachers as readers and writers? What kinds of programs could support in-service teachers as readers and writers? How might pre-service and in-service teachers become agents of change in promoting literacy practices in school? How might the challenges related to critical literacies be overcome? Building on Anderson's (2009) work (see p. 60), some interesting questions include: Why and when do teachers adopt pedagogical change? What factors influence teachers' pedagogical experimentation? What affective components influence teacher decisions about pedagogy? Why might teachers want to change or adopt new/different literacy practices?

Promising approaches: These include practitioner research methods that involve teachers in the reflexive study of their classroom and teaching practices; reflexive engagement, discussion, memory work, and journaling about teachers' own beliefs and literacy practices, such as the work on reflective mapping with beginning teachers in Zambia by Mitchell et al. (1999), as well as Pillay's (2015) two-year Participatory Action Research study with pre-service teachers and Gennrich's (2016) work with in-service teachers who were completing a Bachelor of Education program in South Africa.



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Research Area 5: Sexual Health Literacies

Rationale: Research shows the strong need for comprehensive sexuality education and attention to sexual and reproductive health in the support of gender equality and girls' and women's empowerment. For example, the Canadian government recently committed \$650 million in funding over three years to address sexual and gender-based violence and women's and girls' sexual and reproductive health and rights,³⁵ including in the areas of sexuality education, strengthening reproductive health services, family planning and contraceptives, child and early forced marriage and FGM, and access to abortion and post-abortion care. In this context, what opportunities exist that bring together questions about gender, literacy, empowerment, and sexual health? In what ways can work in the area of literacies help better prepare and support teachers to teach about sexual health? In what ways do young people's literacy practices influence how they access and engage with sexual health information to negotiate safer and more gender equitable relationships? What types of literacies foster the agency of young people? This area might also explore how literacies intersect with agency, stigma, risk, and social power.

Promising approaches: These include work in the area of sexual health education such as the qualitative, participatory, and visual work as part of a sexual and health literacy research project in Uganda involving University of British Columbia scholars, Norton, Kendrick, and Jones with Mutonyi from Uganda Martyrs University. Additionally, decades of scholarship have been produced by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Center for Visual Methodologies and Social Change in South Africa in the areas of sexual agency, exploring concepts such as representation, stigma, and risk. Also promising are the approaches to peer education and participatory curriculum development (see Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Ngidi & Moletsane, 2016).

Research Area 6: Gender, Literacy, and the School Environment

Rationale: A gender-responsive, whole-school approach means bringing together a number of different areas in an integrated and holistic way that considers the school as a community. There is a need to better understand the gendered dimensions between and among multiple factors that influence the school environment, including infrastructure and how schools are governed, efforts to address SRGBV, women teachers, extra-curricular activities that support young people such as clubs, children's play, and sports, and the use of an inclusive framework. While a number of studies have been implemented with a focus on gender parity, there is a need to explore the implications of a gender-responsive, whole-school approach more explicitly in relation to girls' literacy and empowerment. Research in this area may examine areas individually, for example, through the following questions.

School governance: What are the experiences, capacities and challenges of schools working to develop child-friendly, rights-based, and gender-responsive education (Chege, 2006)? In what ways are communities involved in school governance?

³⁵ https://www.canada.ca/en/global-affairs/news/2017/03/canada_announcessupportforsexualandreproductivehealthandrights.html



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Infrastructure: How do infrastructure and access to basic services intersect with and shape gendered literacy practices and the empowerment of women and girls, both in schools but also within communities more broadly?

SRGBV: “There has been a large expansion in recent years of international and policy activity on school-related gender-based violence, but we need more research to understand whether or how they influence young people’s day-to-day experiences of violence” (Parkes, 2016, para 7)³⁶. What are the implications of the various policies, models, and toolkits for addressing gender violence in schools, specifically in relation to quality education and gender-sensitive literacy interventions?

Women in schools: What are the experiences and specific needs of women teachers, leaders and classroom assistants? How does this differ across urban and rural contexts, and for women in different positions and life stages?

Disability and inclusion: What is the relationship between gender, disability, literacy, and empowerment? What might intersectional and inclusive approaches to literacy look like? In what ways can intersectional thinking support gender-responsive, inclusive education frameworks?

Community involvement: What is the relationship between community involvement in schooling, and the literacy practices of girls and boys, their families, and communities?

*Note that although part of the school environment, clubs and MHM are developed below as separate recommended areas of research.

Additionally, each of these areas could also be brought together with others to examine the relationships between gender and, for example, toilets and MHM, school leadership and women teachers, SRGBV and community involvement, or libraries and disability.

Promising approaches: These include the extended and holistic study of the relationship between gender, literacy, and school culture in classrooms and through in-school support systems like extra-curricular clubs and counseling services. Such research would bring together participatory, ethnographic, interview, focus group and observation methods about the experiences of girls, boy, teachers, and school leaders, with textual analysis of both literacy materials, events, and practices. See, for example: CAMFED International’s (2016) Learner Guide Program; Bajaj’s (2009) study of the daily routines and practices of the Umutende School boarding school in Zambia; Bhana’s (2005) study of children’s schoolyard play and songs in South Africa; and, Chege and colleagues’ work in relation to the experiences of students with visual disabilities seeking support in the transition from secondary school to university in Kenya.

³⁶ <https://ioelondonblog.wordpress.com/2016/10/11/ending-gender-violence-in-schools-what-works-and-what-does-research-tell-us/>



Research Area 7: Literacies and Girls' Clubs

Rationale: The idea of school-based and extra-curricular clubs is being widely promoted as an important strategy for supporting girls' education and gender empowerment, more generally (see UNESCO, 2014). However, there seems to be very scant scholarly study of girls' clubs and gender clubs in African contexts. What is happening with girls' clubs and gender clubs? Given the widespread use of these clubs, how do they matter in relation to literacy and empowerment? With a shortage of research in this area, what type of research is needed? What are the different structures of these collectives, groups, and networks? In what ways do clubs enhance social connectedness or exacerbate social exclusion, for example? What are the implications of clubs in girls' and boys' lives, both in the moment, as well as over the longer-term? What happens as girls and boys get older? Do they stay involved, and, if so, in what ways? Do the networks continue? To what extent do clubs promote different types of literacy practices (such as book clubs, writing circles, reading groups, and human rights clubs)?

Promising approaches: These include the ActionAid gender violence project in Ghana, Kenya, and Mozambique; Kendrick, Early, and Chemjor's (2012, 2013) work with an afterschool journalism club at a boarding school for girls in Kenya; Mattos's (2013) work with an extra-curricular reading club in South Africa; and the CAMFED International (2016) programs to develop alumnae networks.

Research Area 8: Literacies, Puberty Education and Menstrual Hygiene Management

Rationale: Research suggests that Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) plays a fundamental role in supporting girls' education, sexual and reproductive health, and empowerment. Girls' lack of adequate support to manage their menstrual cycles at school significantly influences their experiences of schooling and decisions to miss or leave school (see UNESCO, 2014b). Yet the relationship between MHM and literacies is understudied. Gender and literacy research in the area of puberty education and MHM offers important opportunities to bring together educational outcomes with sexual and reproductive health goals. MHM brings together different areas of the review such as policy and curricula, sanitary facilities, the need for comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education, and the recent interest in Puberty Readers. There is a need for stronger evidence about the implications of MHM in these areas. As identified by Marni Sommer, little is known, for example, about the role of teachers, principals, and administrators in supporting and improving MHM in schools. How do teachers and leaders understand girls' menstrual health challenges? How is MHM taken up in teacher education and school curricula, and how could this be strengthened in ways that work simultaneously to support literacy goals? What support and information do girls and teachers need for MHM? How might girls' voices influence the development of Puberty Readers, in-school MHM support, and sanitary facilities? What considerations need to shape the development of Puberty Readers in culturally appropriate and gender-progressive ways? When Puberty Readers are available, how are they taken up across classrooms, families, and communities? In what ways do they promote literacy and transform gender relations? What might a participatory, comparative analysis look like?

Promising approaches: In relation to puberty education and MHM, this area could build on the work of Sommer (2009, 2010), Blake et al. (2017), and UNESCO (2014b).



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APPENDIX A: TERMS OF REFERENCE

Part A: Literature Review

The main focus of the literature review will be on the following areas with room to expand as the review proceeds:

- A. Girls' and young women's literacies
 - Reaching out-of-school girls
 - Addressing girls and disability
 - Gender as an issue in post-conflict settings
- B. Women teachers, empowerment and literacy
- C. What about the boys? Gender-inclusive literacies?
- D. Gender empowerment and its critique in the context of literacies

Within each of these broader topics, specific questions pertaining to education will be addressed such as:

- teaching and learning practices and policies that are particularly effective in responding to the learning needs of girls
- teaching and learning practices that can help overcome gender discrimination and gender-based violence
- pedagogy that helps expose and address gender-biased attitudes, roles and behaviours

The literature review will be responsive to the new focus of Global Affairs Canada: “Women and girls will be at the heart of Canada’s new approach. We want to support them in their role as equal agents for change in their communities and countries... Empowerment of women and girls and the protection and promotion of their rights through advancing gender equality will be at the heart of Canada’s international assistance.”

This literature review will also attend to the multiple aspects of Goals #4 and #5 of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*.

African scholars on the Advisory Committee will be asked to contribute local materials, reports, and unpublished scholarship to help develop this section.

Part B: Action Plan Preliminary Suggestions

Part B will begin to identify possible directions for research relevant to improving Reading CODE (below), as well as the parameters laid out by GAC (above) and the Goals #4 and #5 of SDGs. African scholars on the Advisory Committee will be invited to review drafts of the literature review, and to contribute to a consideration of CODE’s research-based plans for the future. Such activities might entail a revision, redirection, or expansion of current programs and projects. The consultant will coordinate the reviews of Part A, as made by African scholars on the Advisory Committee.



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APPENDIX B: GUIDING DOCUMENTS

Reading CODE

Reading CODE provides research informed, current, relevant and practical professional education for teachers so they can:

- More effectively teach children to read, write, and think
- Learn strategies that maximize the participation and meaningful involvement of all of their students, all of the time despite overcrowded classrooms and challenging conditions
- Implement with confidence a carefully selected set of adaptable and proven literacy strategies designed to build their students' abilities to read fluently with understanding; to interpret and respond thoughtfully to what they read; to expand their vocabularies; and to build their writing skills
- Understand the importance of always teaching vocabulary and word analysis skills within the context of a meaningful story or text (the 'whole-part-whole' model), rather than presenting students with isolated lists of syllables or randomly chosen lists of words
- Generate their own instructional reading materials and use the books they have access to in a wide variety of ways so as to enrich their students' learning and maximize the effective use of limited resources

Reading CODE also provides state-of-the-art professional education and ongoing support to in- country authors, illustrators, and publishers:

- To develop the skills needed to create *engaging, culturally relevant* books for children
- To create books that introduce children to the pleasures and possibilities of reading
- To create books that support the use of the instructional strategies featured in the project workshops for teachers, administrators, and teacher educators
- To craft books that supplement and expand topics addressed by the national curriculum
- To ensure access to the books by teachers, students, and (where possible) their families through the development of in-school libraries



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Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy

In June 2017, Global Affairs Canada launched the new *Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy*, which explicitly defines a feminist approach as follows:

Committing to a feminist approach to international assistance represents a significant shift in how we work. A feminist approach is much more than focusing exclusively on women and girls; rather, it is the most effective way to target the root causes of poverty that can affect everyone: inequality and exclusion.

This policy identifies six priority action areas, as follows:

Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls will be our core area of work. We will support efforts to reduce sexual and gender-based violence; to strengthen women's organizations and movements that advance women's rights; to improve governments' capacity to provide services to women and girls and to improve gender analysis. We also believe that gender equality can be advanced throughout our work by integrating this analysis across the other areas of action. A feminist approach does not limit the focus of our efforts on women and girls; rather, it is the most effective way to fight the root causes of poverty that can affect everyone: inequality and exclusion.

To promote **Human Dignity** we will support access to quality health care, nutrition and education, and principled, timely, needs-based humanitarian assistance that better addresses the particular needs and potential of women and girls.

To foster **Growth That Works for Everyone** we will help increase women's access to economic opportunities and resources. This will help women and girls achieve the economic independence they need to take control of their lives.

To promote **Environment and Climate Action** we will support government planning and initiatives to mitigate and adapt to climate change, advance women's leadership and decision-making and create economic opportunities for women in clean energy.

To support **Inclusive Governance** we will work to end gender discrimination by promoting and protecting human rights, advancing the rule of law, and building stronger institutions. We will also encourage greater political participation by women and girls.

To help strengthen global **Peace and Security** we will support greater participation of women in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction efforts, help to increase women's representation in the security sector and enforce a zero-tolerance policy for sexual violence and abuse by peacekeepers.



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Sustainable Development Goals

SDG Goal 4: Quality Education

Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 4 Targets:

- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and Goal-4 effective learning outcomes
- By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education
- By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university
- By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship
- By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations
- By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy
- By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development
- Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all
- By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries
- By 2030, substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing states

SDG Goal 5: Gender Equality

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Goal 5 Targets

- End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere
- Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation



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- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate
- Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences
- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws
- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels



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APPENDIX C: COMPREHENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adding to the works cited in this review, a number of additional resources were identified and compiled, not all of which have been reviewed here. Given the scarcity of research in the area of gender and literacy in Africa, the act of tracing and compiling scholarship that has some relevance to the study of gender, language, literacy and education is a significant contribution to the development of a research agenda. This comprehensive bibliography acknowledges and celebrates the work that has been done, networks of organizations and scholars engaged in gender and literacy issues, and suggests a fairly broad base of research that might inform further research.

Additional References Relevant to Gender, Literacy and Schooling in African Contexts

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