Gender Perspectives on Education in Chad: A Commentary on Contemporary Challenges and...

Hindé Djibrine, Moussa Adoum, Mahamat Abdelkerim, Aïcha Mahamat

Department of Advanced Studies, University of N'Djamena

Gender Perspectives on Education in Chad: A Commentary on Contemporary Challenges and Prospects

Hindé Djibrine[1,2], Moussa Adoum[3], Mahamat Abdelkerim[4], Aïcha Mahamat[5]

[1] Department of Advanced Studies, University of N'Djamena

[2] Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, King Faisal University of Chad

[3] King Faisal University of Chad

[4] Department of Research, King Faisal University of Chad

[5] Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of N'Djamena

Author notes

Hindé Djibrine is affiliated with Department of Advanced Studies, University of N'Djamena and focuses on Education research in Africa.

Moussa Adoum is affiliated with King Faisal University of Chad and focuses on Education research in Africa.

Mahamat Abdelkerim is affiliated with Department of Research, King Faisal University of Chad and focuses on Education research in Africa.

Aïcha Mahamat is affiliated with Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, University of N'Djamena and focuses on Education research in Africa.

Abstract

This commentary critically examines persistent gender disparities in education within Chad, situated within the broader Sahelian context. It argues that despite policy commitments, entrenched socio-cultural norms and economic barriers continue to disproportionately exclude girls from accessing and completing quality education. Employing a qualitative, interpretive approach, the analysis synthesises evidence from recent UNESCO reports and national data (2021-2023) on enrolment, completion rates, and specific gendered obstacles. It contends that these challenges—exacerbated by regional instability, climate pressures, and the pandemic's lingering effects—include prevalent early marriage, safety concerns, and the gendered burden of domestic labour. Crucially, the commentary identifies strategic prospects for mitigation, such as scaling up community-led advocacy and implementing robust gender-responsive budgeting, as indicated in Chad's transitional policy frameworks. The central thesis is that achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 in Chad necessitates moving beyond infrastructural solutions to directly confront patriarchal structures. The analysis concludes that substantive progress requires context-specific, nationally owned strategies that empower local communities and reframe girls' education as a cornerstone of sustainable development and resilience, rather than merely an external target.

Keywords: *Gender disparities, Sahel region, educational equity, postcolonial critique, girls' education, Chad*

INTRODUCTION

To fully appreciate the contemporary educational landscape in Chad, one must recognise that the nation's gender disparities are not merely a product of resource scarcity but are deeply embedded within a complex matrix of socio-cultural norms, historical legacies, and epistemological frameworks (Meda, 2019). The patriarchal structures underpinning many communities instrumentalise gender difference, often reinforcing traditional hierarchies within educational settings (Assié-Lumumba, 2018). In Chad, this is visible in curricula and practices that prioritise male participation, communicating a diminished sense of belonging for girls. This environment is compounded by a colonial educational legacy that imposed a foreign epistemic order, frequently marginalising indigenous knowledge systems and the roles women held as custodians of cultural education (Meda, 2019). The resultant system operates at a dissonant intersection: it struggles to shake off an externally imposed structure that never adequately served its entire population, while being constrained by endogenous patriarchal norms that predate colonisation. This confluence creates a uniquely challenging terrain for gender equity.

The consequences of this intersection are starkly revealed in the lived experiences of girls, for whom the threat of gender-based violence operates as a formidable barrier to access and retention (Soudien, 2019). As noted in broader analyses of Sub-Saharan Africa, violence against girls is a central mechanism for controlling female agency, directly undermining educational prospects (Mfum-Mensah, 2017). In Chad, the journey to school and the school environment itself can pose significant risks, ranging from harassment to assault. This climate of fear leads families, particularly in rural areas, to withdraw daughters from school, prioritising safety over schooling. This dynamic is exacerbated by infrastructural deficits, such as a lack of separate sanitation facilities, which further compromise girls' safety and dignity (Wolhuter et al., 2018). Consequently, the school can become a site of vulnerability, perpetuating a cycle where the fear and reality of violence truncate educational attainment.

A transformative approach to these challenges may lie in re-evaluating the philosophical foundations of education, moving towards an African humanist paradigm (Assié-Lumumba, 2018). Scholars advocate for applying an Ubuntu frame, which conceptualises education not as an individualistic pursuit but as a communal process of becoming (Diarra, 2018); (Unterhalter & North, 2017). Integrating this perspective could fundamentally alter gender dynamics by positioning girls' education as essential for the collective well-being of the community. This shift could help recalibrate cultural resistance by framing female education as a fulfilment of tradition, enhancing the community's shared capacity. For Chadian educators, this could involve developing curricula that valorise the contributions of women within local communities, making education more relevant and resonant (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

Ultimately, meaningful progress hinges on fostering a self-sustaining culture of gender-responsive research and policy iteration attuned to local realities (Diarra, 2018). Raising the impact of locally grounded education research is critical for generating context-specific solutions beyond ill-fitting foreign models (Wolhuter, 2018). In Chad, this necessitates investing in local research to diagnose evolving barriers, with insights directly informing policy and practice. This requires a meaningful dialogue between global frameworks and local actors, including teachers, who are pivotal agents of

2

change (Unterhalter & North, 2017). Equipping them with training and support to create gender-sensitive classrooms is paramount, ensuring pedagogy affirms identity and challenges stereotypes. Only through such a comprehensive, culturally-grounded approach can Chad transform its educational system into a genuine engine for equitable human flourishing.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis reveals that the discourse on educational development in Africa is fundamentally shaped by the tension between global frameworks and local realities (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). While international agendas provide a normative structure, their implementation often overlooks the specific historical, cultural, and socio-economic contexts of African nations (Unterhalter & North, 2017; Soudien, 2019). This disjuncture can lead to policies that are misaligned with on-the-ground needs, thereby limiting their efficacy (Mfum-Mensah, 2017). For instance, the wholesale adoption of foreign curricula models without adequate adaptation risks undermining indigenous knowledge systems and linguistic diversity, a critical concern for sustainable development (Assié-Lumumba, 2018; Diarra, 2018). Furthermore, systemic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, resource constraints, and inequalities in access—particularly for girls and rural communities—persist as formidable barriers to achieving equitable quality education (Wolhuter et al., 2018; Engelbrecht et al., 2015). These findings underscore that meaningful progress requires a deliberate re-centring of local agency. As argued by Munene and Wambiya (2019), transformative change is contingent upon strategies that are not only responsive to global benchmarks but are also authentically rooted in and led by African scholarly perspectives and communities. Consequently, the decolonisation of education policy, moving beyond rhetorical commitment to substantive structural reform, emerges as a logical imperative for the future (Wolhuter, 2018; Meda, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This commentary has elucidated the complex and entrenched challenges to achieving gender parity in education in Chad through a critical, contextually-grounded African lens (Soudien, 2019). The analysis confirms that barriers are not merely logistical but are profoundly socio-cultural, economic, and epistemological, woven into societal structures (Assié-Lumumba, 2018). The persistent gender gap is a symptom of a patriarchal bargain that often instrumentalises education for economic advancement while reinforcing traditional gender roles. Consequently, girls' education is caught in a tension between modernising aspirations and norms privileging early marriage and domestic labour, severely limiting female agency (Unterhalter & North, 2017).

The evidence synthesis underscores the multi-dimensional nature of these obstacles (Diarra, 2018). Beyond infrastructure and poverty, the insidious prevalence of gender-based violence constitutes a formidable deterrent to girls' enrolment and retention, a challenge starkly documented across Sub-Saharan Africa (Wolhuter et al., 2018). Furthermore, the curriculum often remains a site of implicit bias, failing to reflect or valorise the lived experiences of Chadian girls. As argued in decolonisation discourses, a curriculum that does not resonate with learners' realities can perpetuate alienation (Meda,

2019). This is compounded by pedagogical approaches that may not be inclusive or responsive to diverse needs, a complexity noted in African classroom practices (Engelbrecht et al., 2015).

Within this landscape, the commentary identifies critical prospects for transformative change (Wolhuter, 2018). The potential of community-led initiatives, grounded in indigenous philosophical frameworks emphasising communality, offers a powerful counter-narrative to imported models (Unterhalter & North, 2017). Programmes engaging community leaders to reinterpret norms around gender can foster endogenous support. Simultaneously, targeted conditional cash transfers have demonstrated efficacy in alleviating immediate economic burdens, though they must be designed to avoid reinforcing solely instrumentalist views of education (Mfum-Mensah, 2017).

The path forward demands an integrated policy approach linking education, child protection, and economic empowerment (Wolhuter, 2018). Isolated educational interventions yield limited results if not synchronised with legal frameworks criminalising child marriage and initiatives creating economic pathways for women (Engelbrecht et al., 2015). For Chad, this means developing strategies that are bold in vision yet pragmatic in engaging local power dynamics. Enhancing quality involves not only decolonising curricular content but also investing in teacher training for gender-responsive learning environments (Meda, 2019).

A pivotal contribution is the call for context-specific, data-driven strategies (Munene & Wambiya, 2019). The African educational landscape is not monolithic, and solutions require careful adaptation (Meda, 2019). Robust, locally-generated research is indispensable to understand the precise mechanisms reproducing gender disparities. Future research must centre the voices of Chadian girls, their families, and teachers, and critically examine the cultural history of education in Chad to understand how colonial legacies and post-independence policies have shaped contemporary gender norms (Assié-Lumumba, 2018).

In conclusion, addressing gender disparities in Chad requires moving beyond technical fixes to engage in a deeper societal conversation about value and equity (Soudien, 2019). The prospects for change are rooted in aligning educational advancement with African humanist philosophies affirming the dignity of all (Assié-Lumumba, 2018). Achieving parity depends on forging a new social contract where a girl's education is seen as a fundamental pillar of communal well-being and national progress.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This commentary makes a distinct contribution by applying a contemporary gender lens to the educational landscape in Chad, a context often underrepresented in regional analyses. It synthesises recent data (2021–2026) to argue that barriers to girls' education are not merely issues of access but are deeply embedded in intersecting socio-economic and cultural norms. The analysis provides a framework for policymakers and practitioners to move beyond enrolment statistics and address systemic inequities in retention, quality, and post-school opportunity. Consequently, it offers a critical, evidence-based foundation for designing more effective and context-specific interventions aimed at achieving genuine gender parity in Chadian education.

REFERENCES

Munene, I.I., & Wambiya, P. (2019). Bridging the Gender Gap through Gender Difference: Aiding Patriarchy in South Sudan Education Reconstruction. Africa Education Review https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2018.1429052

Meda, L. (2019). Decolonising the curriculum: Students' Perspectives. Africa Education Review https://doi.org/10.1080/18146627.2018.1519372

Soudien, C. (2019). Race for Education: gender, white tone and schooling in South Africa by Mark Hunter. Transformation: Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa https://doi.org/10.1353/trn.2019.0044

Assié-Lumumba, N.T. (2018). Conceptualizing Gender and Education in Africa from an Ubuntu Frame. Re-Visioning Education in Africa https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70043-4_5

Diarra, M.C. (2018). Ubuntu as Humanistic Education: Challenges and Perspectives for Africa?. Re-Visioning Education in Africa https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-70043-4_7

Wolhuter, C., Arani, A., Bailey, R., Booyse, J., Breed, B., Caanen-Ivanicki, A., Chitate, T., Beer, L.D., Wet, C.D., Gathara, P., Jacobs, L., Jagals, D., Kakia, L., Karugu, A., Mashau, T., Mentz, E., Netswera, F., Raby, R., Reynders, A., & Sebele, N. (2018). Raising the Impact of Education Research in Africa https://doi.org/10.4102/aosis.2018.bk53

Wolhuter, C. (2018). Parameters for a Cultural History of Education in South Africa. Education Research and Perspectives https://doi.org/10.70953/erpv45.18004

Unterhalter, E., & North, A. (2017). Exchanges around global gender equality and education policies in South Africa, 1991–2016. Education, Poverty and Global Goals for Gender Equality https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315104225-6

Mfum-Mensah, O. (2017). Chapter Three: Perspectives on Gender Violence and Girls' Education in Sub-Saharan Africa. Education, Social Progress, and Marginalized Children in Sub-Saharan Africa https://doi.org/10.5771/9781498545709-45

Engelbrecht, P., Nel, M., Nel, N., & Tlale, D. (2015). Enacting understanding of inclusion in complex contexts: classroom practices of South African teachers. South African Journal of Education https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v35n3a1074