

Gender inequality in education



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

This report has been written because the main aim of this research project is to investigate if there is a gender gap between boys and girls achievement in schools. Whether the education system was biased to one gender? If so what are the factors which cause this? Are there any possible solutions that can be used to solve this? The reasons behind why boys do not achieve as well as girls in school. The objectives of this report are to discuss, to discover and investigate why there is gender gap also why boys lack behind girls. This report examines to discuss the causes of this gender gap in schools for girls and boys. The issues that will be discussed in this report are as follows: the history behind the gender gap in achievement in schools because boys were once doing better than girls. The reason for this was that girls had to stay home as housewives also girls had to gain more marks in 11 plus exams than boys. Another aspect that will be looked at are schools too feminised which may give an advantage to girls. Other ideas which will be argued are how the curriculum is implemented and how subjects are assessed in schools. Other factors that may affect boys achievement in schools are peer pressure from friends if they worked hard in school they may be stereotyped as a geek also learning styles may affect attainment. But does social class and ethnicity affect the achievement of children in schools. However there are subjects that favour boys than girls and vice a versa such as boys do better than girls in maths and science but on the other hand girls do better in English. This report will evaluate factors that can improve this gap by having single sex classes and single sex schools. The report will contrast the 'for' and the 'against' arguments of having single sex classes and single sex schools. Definitions of the word gender differences

Literature review

There has been a lot of work done on boys and girls achievement in schools: narrowing down the gap. In 1960 young boys were 21 times more likely to attend university than girls. It can be suggested that the changing world is having an impact on boys achievement in terms of boys attainment in schools and that of girls success in schools. It was suggested that the equal pay act and that of the sex discrimination act (1970) changed the emphases of education policy and that can be noted as a key period of history that changed the objectives of girls in terms of careers and attainment. Girls had to achieve higher marks in their 11 plus examination than boys. Elwood J et al (1998, p. 5) states that '11 plus examination ... children used to be selected for secondary schooling, were deliberately skewed so that girls had to achieve better results than boys'. The period 1950-1960 found the reasons behind this was because boys matured later than girls which would not have been fair to leave out boys from attending grammar schools. But in 1990 there was concern over boys achievement in schools.

It has been suggested that in societies such as the UK the socialisation process as it operated at least up to the 1970s meant that many parents socialised their daughters to show dependence, obedience, conformity and domesticity whereas boys were encouraged to be dominant, competitive and self-reliant. Also when young children saw their parents acting out traditional gender roles many would perceive these roles as natural and inevitable leading girls and boys to imagine their futures as fulltime housewives and mothers and as fulltime paid employees respectively. In schools teachers praised girls for "feminine qualities" and boys for "masculine qualities";

<https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-education/>

boys and girls were encouraged to opt for traditional male and female subjects and then for traditional male and female careers. Furthermore in certain sections of the mass media [and especially perhaps in teenage magazines] girls were encouraged to recognize the all importance of finding " Mr. Right" and settling down to a life of blissful domesticity in their traditional housewife-mother roles. Cole (2006, p. 26) suggests that even before children go to school their parents will treat a boy and girl very different. Even in society throughout history this has occurred. A lot of research has gone into this; your gender is an issue from the minute you are born. Automatically society will say how a girl will behave and how a boy will behave. If it is a boy, oh he's like that because he's a boy and boys always take longer to grasp it.

Girls, even in the late 1960s were more likely than boys to gain 5 or more GCE Ordinary Level pass grades. From the 1960s to the 1980s the percentages of girls and boys gaining 5 or more GCE Ordinary Level pass grades gradually increased but the so-called " gender gap" in educational attainment increased especially once the GCSE was introduced primarily because girls have maintained their traditional higher attainment levels in Arts and Humanities subjects but also reduced [and in some years overturned] the traditional attainment gaps in favour of boys in Mathematics and Science subjects. The GCSE was introduced in 1988 and from then onwards the female- male gender difference in educational achievement at GCSE level widened as differences between the [higher] female pass rates and the male pass rates in Arts and Humanities widened and females narrowed or sometimes reversed the traditional higher male pass rates in

Mathematics and science subjects. It has been claimed that the relative improvement of female educational achievements can be explained partly by the nature of the new GCSE courses. This has been disputed, however, on the grounds that several factors have contributed to these trends. By the late 1980s females were more likely than males to gain two or more Advanced Level passes and during the course of the 1990s they also became more likely to gain 3 or more A level passes. Females also soon became more likely than males to gain A grades in almost all Advanced Level subjects. Nevertheless gender differences in examination performance at Advanced level are smaller than at GCSE level.

In 2007-2008 69.3% of girls and 60.1% of boys achieved 5 or more GCSE Grade A*-C passes; 51.3% of girls and 42.0% of boys achieved 5 or more GCSE Grade A*-C passes including English and Maths. The gender difference in examination success varies considerably from subject to subject. For example girls in 2007-2008 girls outperformed boys by 14% in English, 16% in Design and Technology, 9% in Modern Foreign Languages, 17% in Art and Design and 12% in English Literature but by only 1% in Mathematics, 2% in Core Sciences, 1% in Chemistry and 2% in Classical Studies. Although the data are not presented here Girls are now more likely to gain A* and A grades in most but not all GCSE subjects.

Other areas the research will focus on are schools too feminised, advantage for girls but disadvantage for boys. Hutchings (2002) states 'the phrase feminisation is used simply to refer to the fact that there are more female teachers than male, especially in the primary sector'. (Biddulph, 1997 cited in Skelton et al, 2007) state that 'the current situation is often presented as <https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-education/>

one which is detrimental to the educational experiences and opportunities of boys with the implication that boys do better when taught by men teachers'. (Skelton et al, 2007) suggest that 'Another use of the phrase 'feminisation of schools' is in relation to the idea that the predominance of females has led to the delivery of the curriculum, assessment practices and the management and organisation of the classroom becoming more 'feminine' in nature'. Female teachers are more lenient on boys than male teachers also male teachers can be role models for pupils which will enable the child to be motivated to learn and succeed in education.

Findings have suggested that it is vital to keep the subjects taught in curriculum interesting for children to learn about in class. This may enable children to be motivated to learn and gets rid of the label of boringness of lessons. Jackson (2006, p. 127) states that 'if students find the curriculum boring, it provides little incentive for them to counter the 'uncool to work' discourse'.

Methods of assessment have been identified particularly frequently as a key factor in this 'bias against boys'. An increased amount of assessed coursework has been suggested to explain boys doing less well at GCSE and A levels, with the argument being that boys do less well at coursework because of their preferred learning styles (Skelton et al, 2007). Girls do less well at 'sudden death' exams (timed exams previously unseen by the candidate) which rely on last-minute revision and require self-confidence. This latter form of assessment has been argued to favour boys, and was the basis for O level exams (the exams that preceded GCSEs in Britain). Bleach, 1998, cited in Skelton et al, 2007 'In fact, however, girls' results were already

<https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-education/>

improving before the GCSE assessment model was introduced'. And further, Arnot et al. (1999) discuss how a reduction in the coursework component in public examinations in the 1990s did little to alter the pattern of gender achievement (Skelton et al, 2007).

Another issue could be masculinity peer pressure from friends Jackson (2006, p. 74) states that 'the uncool to work' this statement is suggesting that if boys work hard at school they will not be cool. (Jackson, 2006, p. 84) 'Those who seem to be most disadvantaged as a result of the discourse are those who attempt to balance academic work and popularity but can not manage to do both successfully'. This is a powerful predictor in a lot of schools, this is seen as social status of pupils needs to be popular and be part of a group. A lot of pupils will feel being unpopular is not as good as anything else. Also it will lead to negative impact. Both girls and boys have to act as they are chilled, relaxed, laid back when it comes to the academic side of work.

As the relative rate of female educational improvement increased it came to be argued that this might be explained to some extent by biological factors. Experiments investigating the brain activities of male and female babies suggested that differences in the structures of female and male brains respectively may mean that females have genetically determined linguistic advantages which would explain females especial facility with language based subjects. It was also suggested that girls' earlier maturity means that they can concentrate more effectively and are better organised especially in relation to course work. This was considered to be a significant point because the relative improvement in female GCSE results was associated especially with the introduction of coursework-based assessments which had

<https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-education/>

been absent from the GCE Ordinary Level examinations which the GCSE replaced. However in relation to these theories it should be noted that male-female differences in Advanced level language examination results are small, that the relationships between physical and intellectual maturity are uncertain and that gender differences in examination results cannot be explained only by the presence or absence of coursework.

Other factors that may affect attainment are different learning styles, both boys and girls learn differently, but we need to be careful we do not stereotype on gender. When looking at the gender debate it has been suggested by Coffield (2004) that consideration to learning styles is important when establishing the link as to why there is a gap between boys and girls due to peer pressure for the boys what their friends may think if they achieved well in school, the way boys are assessed in schools for instance boys do better in exams than coursework. Examples of these could be boys would prefer to learn kinaesthetically by doing things such as experiments or activities and girls would learn well visually by seeing. Interest in 'learning styles' has grown rapidly in recent years and perceived differences in the learning styles of boys and girls are one of the most frequently expressed explanations for the gender gap in achievement. This argument is also based on the presumption that if boys are naturally different to girls because of their biological make-up, then it follows that they will have different approaches to learning (Noble and Bradford, 2000; Gurian, 2002). Studies have shown that the vast majority of boys and girls prioritise a teacher's individual ability as a teacher, and their level of care for their

students, rather than a teacher's gender. Skelton et al (2009), Francis et al (2008).

Boys to better in maths than girls research by Hargreaves et al into pupils' stereotypical attitudes to mathematics and English has shown that stereotypes succeed among pupils, with most believing that maths is a boys' subject where boys do better, and English a girls' subject where girls do better. DfES (2007, p. 3) 'Boys outperform girls in Maths at Key Stage 2, and continue to outnumber girls at higher level maths. But there is a large gender gap favouring girls in English'. On the other hand girls do better in English than boys On the other hand women do better on reading comprehension and vocabulary than men do. APA report state that 'some verbal tasks show substantial mean differences favouring females.

Whitepaper on gender differences in achievement

Social class and ethnicity according to Cole (2006, p. 29) states that 'Gender is not the strongest predictor of attainment. Social class attainment gap at key stage 4 is three times as wide as gender gap'. DfES (2007, p. 3) 'Analysis of the attainment data shows that other factors or a combination of factors, such as ethnicity and social class, have a greater bearing on educational achievement than gender considered on its own. Gender differences in educational achievement are far smaller than social class differences in educational achievement. Students of both sexes who are eligible for free school meals are far less likely than students of both sexes ineligible to be successful at both levels of the education system. Some ethnic differences in

educational achievement are also greater than gender differences in educational achievement.

Statistics on the gender gap between boys and girls Attainment at each end of the distribution of grades also varies by gender. Girls are more likely than boys to gain an A* grade at GCSE. Boys are a little more likely to gain a G grade at GCSE or to gain no GCSEs at all. The largest gender differences (a female advantage of more than ten percentage points on those gaining an A*-C GCSE) are for the Humanities, the Arts and Languages. Smaller gender differences (a female advantage of five percentage points or less) tend to be in Science and Maths subjects. Some of these achievement patterns have been relatively stable over six decades of exam results, particularly in English Language and Literature, French, Art and Design and Religious Studies. There have been changing patterns over the years. In Maths, there has been a shift from a male advantage averaging 4 percentage points prior to 1991 to a slim female advantage of 1-2 percentage points in recent years. In Geography, there has been a widening of the gap in girls' favour, and in History, there has been variation but with girls now doing much better than boys.

This research will explore possible solutions we can use to solve this gap such as single sex schools which may help girls to speak out. Times online (2004) 'Girls in mixed classrooms refrain from speaking up and answering questions'. Another way of solving the gender gap is by having single sex classes in mixed schools so that teachers can meet different learning styles for boys. Research has shown that girls obtain better results in single sex schools in comparison to mixed schools Curtis (2009). Odone (2004)

<https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-education/>

'conversely, that boys do not want to study foreign languages or shine in English literature in case they are mocked as poofs'. Garner (2008)

'Differences in how male and female brains work mean single-sex schooling will make a comeback - leading head mistress in the Independent'. However the disadvantages of sex schools Blair (2006) 'Girls schools feature highly in the league tables because they are highly selective, their children come from particular social backgrounds and they have excellent teachers'. BBC News (2006) 'While both single-sex and co-education have passionate advocates, half a century of research has so far revealed no striking or consistent differences one way or the other'. Odone (2004) 'Children, will inhabit a mixed society later, so let them start young, with mixed classes'. Younger et al (2005, p. 89) found that boys and girls may feel more at ease in single sex classes, feel more able to interact with learning and feel free to show interest in the lesson without inhibition. It was felt that there can be positive effects on achievement for boys in modern languages and girls in science and maths. (Dcfs (2007)

Methodology

The methods that will be used to gather research for this project will be as follows: the use of books to get information on issues affecting gender differences in achievement at schools and what theorist have already found around this agenda. The internet will be useful for this research project because you can research recent and up to date statistical information on the gender gap and get government published on this debate. Journals will be useful for the research project to collect recent data and changes in the debate around boys and girls achievement in schools and narrowing down <https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-education/>

the gap. These methods of researching are called secondary research.

Secondary research is the use of material, which has been researched by someone else. The different research methods for secondary research are as follows: technology based research is to do with researching from the computer to get your information, which has a lot of benefits such as the internet provides online libraries; e-books, journals and encyclopaedias such as infed. The main electronic databases that will be used for this research are as follows education research complete, education online and SwetsWise. The key read that will be used will be based on gender differences and achievement in school also how the search found a number of journals, but some were irrelevant, to the research topic. Search engines help you through the mass of information on the internet two most popular search engines are Bing, google advanced search and google scholar also on the internet you can search for newspaper articles. However web sources may not always be reliable so researchers need to find out how accurate the information there are number of ways to assess the accuracy of the sites. According to Walliman and Buckler (2008, p. 92) 'compare the data with other sources and is it biased many use the web to promote ideas'.

The reasons for choosing to do the research project as a desk study were as follows: to find out what has already been researched in this field and arguments that have already been produced around this agenda. However the reasons for not choosing the fieldwork approach method were because it will be time consuming and availability of schools to carry out the research is limited and difficult to get a place in schools to do observations.

The advantages of the desk study approach are as follows; able to collect, understand and interpret data also to limit costs such as travelling costs. The disadvantages of desk study may be the availability of books from the library

In contrast the advantages of the interview approach (structure and unstructured) advantages of structured interviews are time management can be controlled, results are simple to gather and the questions are securely set in advance. the disadvantages of structured interviews are there might be other questions to ask and you can't develop on questions. The advantages of unstructured interviews are there is a lot of time, you can develop questions and it is a relaxed method. Disadvantages of the interview approach are as follows: The disadvantages of unstructured interviews are the interview can simply be a chat, not all the participants are asked the same questions and only some of the questions are asked.

Indirect observation is when a participant gets their information from viewing from far. Direct observation is when a participant obtains information by combining with the circumstances they are watching. Advantages of the observation approach (direct and indirect) the advantages of observations are actions can be seen in the normal surroundings and observations can both be direct or indirect. Disadvantages of the observation approach (direct and indirect) the disadvantages of observations are they are lengthy and not consistent.

Qualitative vs. quantitative

Analysis

There was clear evidence that in the era of the 11+ pass marks were set higher for girls than for boys so as to prevent girls from taking a disproportionate share of Grammar School places. From the early 1950s until the late 1960s girls were less likely than boys to be entered for GCE Ordinary Level examinations. In any case in the 1950s and early 1960s many pupils left school at age 15 having taken no official national examinations. The candidate pass rate in GCE O Level examinations was higher for girls than for boys from the early 50s to the late 1960s so that despite the higher entry rates for males the percentages of male and female school leavers actually passing 5 or more GCE O levels were fairly similar although females did usually outperform males by 1-2% each year. This overall statistic masked the facts that girls outperformed boys by considerable margins in Arts and Humanities subjects and that boys usually outperformed girls but by smaller margins in Mathematics and Science subjects.

In order to analyse the relative educational improvement from the 1980s onwards we must distinguish between factors accelerating the rate of female improvement and factors restricting the rate of male improvement. Females' and males' educational achievements have improved but the rate of female improvement has been faster and this widened the female-male achievement gap especially at GCSE level. Remember, however, that gender, social class and ethnicity are interconnected. Girls are more successful than boys in all ethnic groups but middle class boys are still more educationally successful than working class girls in all ethnic groups. Gender differences in educational achievement are smaller than social class

differences in educational achievement and some ethnic differences in educational achievement.

Research has shown that " Of the 71, 286 girls who sat GCSEs in single-sex schools over the three-year period, on average all did better than predicted on the basis of their end of primary SATS results. By comparison, of the 647, 942 who took exams in mixed-sex schools, 20% did worse than expected." This means that girls in single sex schools can be expected to do better in their school, in comparison to girls in mixed schools.

Studies have shown that girls in mixed sex classes " tend to refrain from speaking up and boys don't want to study English to avoid being mocked as 'poofs"', therefore single sex schools would help to resolve this issue as they will remove this pressure between the genders and allow both boys and girls to participate freely. Also Single sex schools will benefit students as male and female brains work differently. Girls can relate to emotions more and are seen as caring and talkative they can sit and talk about emotions whereas boys are more likely to do practical things instead of talking of emotions, hence why boys fail in English. So perhaps, as this leading head mistress, quoted in the Independent suggests, single sex classes need to be implemented to meet the learning strategies of the different sexes.

Mainly English and foreign languages is where I believe that pupils need a gender based curriculum as was suggested by the DFES (2007) report it remarks that of the core subjects, the gender gap is widest in English; overall, the differences in language and literacy skills are given as the main cause of the gender gap in attainment. It is suggested that there is around

10% children leaving education with 5 Cs and above girls since 1968 have been slowly achieving better than boys according to Dcfs report into gender. It is a step towards the well researched idea that genders learn differently therefore it is possible to suggest that gender specific learning amongst boys and girls will close the statistical gap of attainment. Although the dfes report suggest that is no substantial evidence to back this up I believe that children will benefit from this approach.

Another issue that I found is that boys tend to do better on spatial skills; they find mathematics and science more interesting to learn about. But on the other hand girls do better on verbal, comprehension and vocabulary skills than boys do.

This table shows the gap in 1989 was just 6% but 10yrs later it had increased to 10%. It is suggested by S. Ball (2008) that this gap is an overall statistic and not subject specific he suggests that in 2004 the deviations of this gap was just 1% and that in some subjects boys achieve better results than girls therefore it is not valid to say that all boys or all girls achieve less in GCSE levels

Conclusions

In conclusion doing this research project on boys and girls achievement in schools and narrowing down the gap. The research found that there is not as big a gap as people thought. The main factors that affect boys achievement are peer pressure and schools too feminised. The research also found that single sex schools and classes do not make that much difference but it found that girls have more confidence to participate in class

<https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-education/>

discussion. In conclusion, the history of the gender gap shows that the gender gap itself has always been present in education, but was hidden by the advantage given to boys in 1960s, and it was often harder for girls to progress into further education, since it was not expected of them, therefore affecting the gender gap in the sense that there were lower numbers of girls than boys progressing.

Over the years boys have improved and so have girls, maintaining the gender gap but showing that boys are adapting to the changes and are working harder to keep up. The gender differences in boys and girls does show that they learn in different ways, and these differences are, now more than ever, taken into account in teaching methods, lesson planning and assessment methods, and there is evidence showing that " Boys are fighting back at A levels, with their results improving more rapidly than girls" (BBC, 2004), however, it is important to " recognise that there are girls and boys who wont fit into these gendered patterns" and therefore focus should still be placed on the individual and not the " biologically predisposed" expectations, (Phoenix, 2004, pg 34). We could also conclude that this improvement could be the first sign that boys are now realising they will have to fight to maintain their place in the workforce, as history shows women have been seen as " servants to the state" (Steedman, 1985, cited in Arnot and Ghail, 2006, pg 19). This oppression of women, like other cases where parts of society have been repressed (e. g. repression of the afro-Caribbean population), resulted in women fighting or rebelling for their place in society, which is not something the male population has had to do. Therefore acting as a source of motivation for women to make sure they are

treated as equals and to progress in life, where as men have missed out on this and until recently, have lacked the motivation to fight for their place. Now men are in a place of competition with women and are now " beginning to see that it's not particularly clever to under-achieve" (BBC, 2004).