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Exploring the Impact of Globalization on Women's Educational Inequality in Developing Countries: A Perspective from Policy Shifts

Yuxin Shu

School of Accounting, Guang Dong Peizheng College, Guangzhou 510830, China

Abstract: This paper aims to explore the impact of globalization processes on educational inequality for women in developing countries, with particular reference to the gender differences in educational reform and policy frameworks affected by them. The study found that globalization can have a positive impact on women's education by driving policy changes and promoting equal access to education. However, despite improvements in education policies, women's participation in science and technology fields and the labor market remains limited. The paper analyzes how globalization affects education systems, the impact of policies on women's educational opportunities, and explores how policy adjustments can promote gender equality and social inclusion.

Keywords: Women's Educational Inequality; Policy; Globalization.

1. Introduction

In developing countries, inequality in women's access to education and the development of this group in society is still regarded as a contemporary issue that can be addressed to promote social inclusion and economic growth. This paper attempts to analyze gender inequality in developing countries from the perspective of education reform and policy frameworks. The factor of globalization cannot be ignored in a comprehensive analysis of modern educational policies [1](Gopinathan, 2007). However, the concept and development of globalization are complex and contradictory, and its conceptualization and implementation remain controversial in terms of its impact on the field of education [2](Norris, 2015). According to Jackson (2016), globalization has been interpreted as a process of integration of political, economic, and cultural exchanges across borders and countries, as well as the gradual elimination of economic borders[3]. Moreover, the expanding influence of globalization and the inevitable international competition have made governments realize that scientific and technological innovations, adapting talents to labor demand, and expanding markets have all become key concepts to enhance competitiveness [4](Sahlberg, 2016). Undoubtedly, under the influence of globalization, the post-industrial economy, science and technology have become the focus of economic development in various countries to improve economic competitiveness. However, when discussing about globalization and technological innovation, the participation of women in developing countries in relevant technologies and labor market demands remains a topic to be explored. Globalization can be seen as a potential channel for educational reform and a major driver of policies that promote equal access to education for women [5](Zajda, 2020). In this process, Levinson and Holland in 1996 proposed that women's unequal access to education does not only mean that they have no or little education, but also that even educated groups of women are subject to specific social rules[6]. This is because most societies provide a set of standards and rules for the "educated group" to judge an individual's level of knowledge [7](Newman, Hoechner & Sancho, 2020). In other words, when considering inequality in female education, the discussion is not only about technical competence but also about whether this group is expected to behave according to the expectations and rules set by society. In previous studies, globalization, gender equality and economic growth are considered to be interrelated and positively correlated [8](Farooq et al., 2020). However, gender imbalances in education limit the optimal integration of women into the labor market and may reduce the efficiency of the labor force. Therefore, this study aims to explore the impact of the outcomes of the globalization process on gender equality in education, based on policies and changes in developing countries. Considering policy shifts is significant as, in attempting to critique globalization and its impact on education, one needs to understand how "ideological packaging" affects gender equality education and practice in developing countries [9](Zajda, 2018).

Since globalization and educational change is a broad concept, this paper will focus on female education in science and technology, labor market demand and policy implications. The paper will begin with a discussion of the impact of globalization on the educational systems of developing countries, in particular the direct and indirect effects of national policies on women's educational opportunities and access. In addition, the paper will analyze how some of the policy changes in developing countries have considered women's educational opportunities and outcomes, as well as gender equality and inclusion in policies. Finally, the paper will critically analyze comprehensive understandings to address gender inequality for social development.

2. Understanding Globalization, Policy, and Gender Inequality in Education

Education has long been the most important factor in national development, not only promoting economic competitiveness, but also promoting national unity and enabling young people to learn their rights and duties [10](Williams, 2009). In the process of promoting education in various country, educational policies were originally

formulated based on the localization of the country's needs and the reform of the educational system was closely related to the society [11](Samoff, 1996). However, as a result of the globalization process, national education policies have to consider international situations and solutions. In addition, although globalization has led to a gradual shift of industrialized organizations and international institutions from developed to developing countries, the needs and goals of third-world countries may be neglected as education systems evolve more to accommodate international rules rather than national indigenous development [12](Williams, 2009). It is worth noting that globalization and educational policy reforms are significant in the discourse of international organizations and institutions, with more and more governments acknowledging that educational policies under globalization should be deployed and used as one of the main offensives to address current and future societal issues [13](Zajda, 2020). Internationally, policy documents from UNESCO, OECD, and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) have committed to a comprehensive approach to globalization and educational reform. In exploring the relevance of globalization to educational change, we need to understand how globalization and its ideologies affect education systems and consider decentralization and implementation from the international to the national government to the local sector [14](Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). However, a large number of studies have shown that the results of the globalization process are not all favorable for the field of education, which often depends on the specific situation of the country [15](Farooq et al., 2020). According to Farooq et al., (2020), globalization does have the opportunity to promote capital and technology and to improve the quality of the labor force and the level of national income [16].Otherwise, it will increase income inequality and destabilize labor markets, and this anti-globalization trend is mainly seen in developing countries. The concept of "developing countries" was developed by scholars in the Western world and has always been associated with poor infrastructure and poverty [17](Dormekpor, 2015). Countries in these particular regions are often referred to as the Third World, such as East and South Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa, and certain parts of sub-Saharan Africa. From a historical perspective, many developing countries experienced independence from colonial powers but continued to rely on developed countries for their economic development [18](Dormekpor, 2015). In addition, these countries have long been committed to eradicating poverty and gender inequality.

With the increasing demand for skilled people in the global market, STEM-related education is becoming a focal point in the field. However, the prospects for women in the industry are not good, and the phrase "women are not suitable for science" has long been a stereotype [19](Xie & Liu, 2023). Xie and Liu (2023) illustrated that at a time when science and technology are the first productive forces, the prolonged absence of women in the field of STEM will weaken their scientific and technological awareness and their influence in the society of the future[20]. Moreover, unequal access to education for women and obstacles in the labor market will directly limit a country's potential pool of human capital, thereby undermining talent and technological diversification. In many third-world countries, girls' education lags behind that of boys, and female human capital in particular is lacking, thus affecting the process of technological innovation and application. Furthermore, Klasen (2007) pointed out that gender inequality is an obstacle to the development process of a country[21]. In fact, since the 1990s, gender issues have become a key priority in global education policies. In 2015, 193 countries adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), most of which mention gender discrimination [22](Altuzarra, Gálvez-Gálvez & González-Flores, 2021). Among several of the agenda's development goals, it is specifically mentioned that educational change should focus on achieving gender equality and women's empowerment, such as ensuring women's equal participation in political, economic, or social decision-making. Furthermore, the goals advocate the creation of an equal labor market for women, as these initiatives will contribute to building sustainable societies and economies [23](Altuzarra, Gálvez-Gálvez & González-Flores, 2021). To sum up, the policies introduced by the globalization process have affected women in various ways. While the international community supports equality and universal access to education, in many developing countries women still face multiple barriers from family, career advancement, and social institutions. These challenges not only limit women's educational opportunities, but also affect their decision-making power and participation in society. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the policies and reforms introduced by globalization for women's equality in education in developing countries.

3. Opportunities and Challenges for Women Arising from Policy Changes in Different Contexts

As described above, globalization has for decades served as a bridge of interdependence between different economies and cultures, gradually leading to world integration. However, as a result of the globalization process, some countries are also facing political, economic and social challenges [24](Zajda, 2020). In this process, globalization has brought positive opportunities and impacts on the lives of women in third-world countries, while at the same time, there are negative phenomena. In this section, the opportunities and challenges for women's education brought about by the policies introduced by globalization will be explored in different cultural contexts. In fact, globalization has created more opportunities for global citizens, and although the strategies used by governments vary, their impact on education may create positive outcomes for citizens. The manifestation of the progress of globalization in the context of gender can be seen in the fact that women enjoy equal education and have better social and economic status [25](Farooq et al., 2020). Currently, the results of globalization have helped educational institutions in many developing countries to tend to develop the global market and use their resources efficiently, and as a result, more and more women in developing countries have more opportunities for higher education and professionally related jobs. In China, women are becoming more educated nowadays. In ancient Chinese history, female education was aimed more at consolidating patriarchal rule than at encouraging women to develop skills [26](Du & He, 2021). In order to eliminate the negative impact of economic globalization on women, China has gradually promulgated relevant policies to reach a consensus on global political and economic development [27](China State Council, 2001). In 2001, The Programme for

the Development of Chinese Women (2001-2010) issued by China, emphasized the incorporation of gender awareness into the educational program and teaching reform, and offered gender and development-related courses in higher education, to ensure gender equality in education. At present, China has established a gender equality policy system based on the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Women's Rights and Interests, which has enabled women to make remarkable achievements in receiving equal education. It is worth noting that the increased educational level of Chinese women has, to a certain extent, reduced gender segregation in the workplace, which means that women have the opportunity to break the social inequity constraint that "women are not suited to science" and integrate into the labor market in the era of science and technology [28](Du & He, 2021). Moreover, addressing gender inequality in India is challenging and has been the focus of global education [29](Chattopadhyay, 2018). Influenced by India's traditional socio-cultural structure, female equality has not been prioritized in the past. In this context, Indian parents usually believe that investing in boys provides a high rate of returns, while girls are born to serve the family. With the growth of the global economy, the Indian government has realized that education is one of the main drivers to enhance the country's economic competitiveness and technological advancement, thus the government has begun to work on policy changes to promote the education and empowerment of women [30](Biswas& Banu, 2023). According to Chattopadhyay (2018), the major obstacle faced by women in India is the literacy rate and hence the National Literacy Programme (NLM) set up by the government was launched in 1988 with the aim of increasing the female literacy rate [31]. Moreover, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is a flagship policy enacted by the government of India [32] (Chattopadhyay, 2018). This initiative provides free basic education for girls between the ages of 6 and 14. With the implementation of this policy, in collaboration with several state governments, the education and empowerment of socially marginalized and rural women was guaranteed, and women were supported to learn to critically formulate and analyze issues. This policy is recognized as a successful female educational intervention in India and internationally. However, a number of policies can not only modestly improve the educational attainment of Indian women, but not completely eliminate it [33] (Das & Pathak, 2012). Most cities in India still had not achieved gender equality because entrenched patriarchy had too much influence on the social fabric. Therefore, although several supportive policies introduced by the government, it is worth considering whether the traditional ideas of the citizens are in line with the development plans of the new era.

However, while the gains of globalization have prompted developing countries to focus on equality in education for women, the increasing number of skilled women around the world has led employers to exploit cheap labor [34] (Tabrizi, 2019). This is a hidden aspect of the result of globalization. As industrial organizations and factories moved to developing countries, more poor families required women to work in factories and under the supervision of men, thus women's access to education is greatly reduced [35] (Tabrizi, 2019). In addition, due to the increased demand for labor-intensive finished products from globalized trade liberalization, women's low wages make this group an attractive source of labor [36] (Mani, Narayanan Gopalakrishnan & Wadhwa, 2020). In other words, women in developing countries are still at a disadvantage of "low wages", "discrimination" and "no education", but the world economic environment provides them with more job opportunities. For example, in South Asia and Latin America, increased overseas export trade is positively correlated with women's employment opportunities, but they may gradually find themselves doesn't have promotion opportunities because they lack the education and professional skills [37] (Mani, Narayanan Gopalakrishnan & Wadhwa, 2020). Furthermore, discussing the impact of globalization on women in developing countries is complex and contradictory. In Bangladesh, there is a paradoxical phenomenon in which the percentage of women completing higher education has increased, but the labor force participation rate has declined significantly [38] (Kabeer, Mahmud & Tasneem, 2011). In fact, the introduction of neoliberal education policies in Bangladesh, including Education for All (EFA) and the Female Allowance Scheme (FSP), has effectively increased female participation in education (Ahmed & Hyndman-Rizk, 2020). However, [39]Ahmed and Hyndman-Rizk (2020) demonstrated that implicit gender stereotypes in higher education affect the professional major choices of Bangladeshi girls. It relates to the assumption we mentioned above that men are considered better suited for STEM subjects, while girls are better suited for the arts and humanities. Criticisms of women's higher education in Bangladesh persist, including the quality of education, women's limited participation in STEM and social marginalization. Therefore, despite the enlightened and proactive policies of the country, the problems arising in the process of delegating power to local implementation are also expected to be solved.

4. The Implications of Addressing Gender Inequality in Education for Global Society

In 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, which aims to achieve sustainable economies and societies and promises to "leave no one behind" [40](United Nations, 2015). Achieving gender equality, eliminating gender disparities and discrimination, and empowering women are important goals in the 2030 Agenda. In this paper, we have tried to discuss the various effects of gender inequality on women through the policies of individual developing countries, but the fact is that the problem is difficult to eliminate completely. Addressing gender inequality is challenging and is seen as Wicked Problems (WP) [41] (Eden & Wagstaff, 2021). In particular, the global spread of COVID-19 in 2020 has had a huge impact on developing countries and has hindered the process of achieving the 2030 Agenda. In addition, when policymakers are in the process of addressing wicked problems, the disagreement, complexity, and uncertainty of the issue often affect the definition of its nature and thus the development of the best solution [42] (O'Brien et al., 2017). The determination of governments to promote female equality in education can be seen in various policies, but the realization of goals remains slow and inefficient. Some scholars have argued that some meaningful policies may have too many goals set and too little specific focus [43] (Selin, 2015). Moreover, the goals in many policies usually have too many complex concepts and do not translate into measurable indicators [44] (Breuer, Janetschek & Malerba, 2019). Although various legal frameworks adopted by

governments to increase female education and achieve gender equality, women are still underrepresented in decision-making. Gender equality is not only defined as the rights of individuals that do not depend on whether they are born male or female, but also interpreted as the freedom of all people to choose and promote themselves without being limited by gender [45][46] (Holzner et al., 2010, Bayeh, 2016). The process of achieving equality in education for women is essential to focus on empowering women as well as on policy. Previous research has shown that achieving the sustainable development goal of gender equality cannot be achieved without women's empowerment [47] (Alvarez & Lopez, 2013, as cited in Bayeh, 2016). Women's empowerment can contribute to women empowering themselves, improving their status through literacy, and education, and allowing women to participate in national decision-making [48] (Bayeh, 2016). In addition, focusing on the education level of women in poor areas can improve the well-being of families and children to some extent. According to Gebru and Demeke (2015), in Ethiopia, for example, huge population growth has put enormous pressure on the government to provide adequate education and health care, leading to high rates of AIDS among women and maternal deaths[49]. Therefore, providing women's education in developing countries where basic safeguards have not yet been achieved is important in terms of both health and socio-economic protection. Furthermore, women need to have a new understanding of traditional gender concepts while getting equal opportunities in education [50](Du & He, 2021). If we look at the history of many countries, we can find cases in most cultural contexts where girls are "educated" for the purpose of strengthening patriarchy [51](Du & He, 2021). Entrenched attitudes mean that even in today's highly developed China and India, there is still a preference for sons and a low level of decision-making power for women. In this process, in addition to the need to strengthen the implementation of policies, it is also extremely important to reshape old perceptions and attitudes of women [52](Jayachandran, 2015). In general, in a competitive globalized economy, the lack of women's participation in the economic development of countries is inconceivable. Inadequate access to education prevents most women from taking up skilled jobs, which harms the country's progress at the desired pace. It is not feasible for any country in the world to focus only on men's contribution to economic development, therefore empowering and educating women and providing them with more opportunities to develop their talents is essential for the economic development of the country.

5. Conclusion

In a globalized world, achieving equality and empowerment of women in education and enabling this group to develop their talents and skills in the economic, social, and political spheres can be one of the pillars of national economic development. This analysis of changes in female educational inequality in several developing countries demonstrates the complex linkages between social structures, ideologies, and educational policy reforms in the context of globalization. It is undeniable that globalization has made a positive contribution to economic development and educational progress in developing countries, making some backward countries aware of the positive link between equality, inclusion and human rights. In addition, in many developing countries, gender equality in economic, cultural, educational, and other aspects has made obvious achievements. According to Milanovic (2016), globalization has also been criticized for widening the gap between rich and poor, as well as socioeconomic status and cultural capital. It is certain that education provides women with the ability to participate in social development, but whether women can break the shackled family and discrimination in the workplace requires countries to continue to update their policies, laws and regulations based on their national conditions, so as to guarantee women's equal rights (Zajda, 2020). In general, to achieve a truly equal society, educators and policymakers are expected to pay attention to the key issues at the heart of current reforms: equity, social justice, and human rights, rather than policy rhetoric (Zajda & Ozdowski, 2016).

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