

## Gender Equality in Education in Uganda, Rwanda & South Sudan: A Comparative Study of Milieus

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**Abstract:** This is a theoretical paper with a charge to examine the scope and character of gender equality in the education systems of Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan through a review of cross-national literature using feminist lens to interpret their connotations. While Uganda and South Sudan have invariably sought to enact affirmative action geared at achieving increased access for girl children, Rwanda has by and large focused on shifting from affirmative action to more holistic gender-responsive strategies in its crusade. This, perhaps, is the most convincing notion of salience among the three East African countries; confirming that formal opportunities for equal treatment of girl children ensure neither a shared starting point nor equal outcomes because of different cross-national milieus of change. In Uganda, the flagship of government initiative is the 1997 UPE which has since its launch spurred a big rise in the number of school girls across the country. The extension of the free education policy to 12 years represents Rwanda's best bid to attain gender equality; while the Go to School Initiative is South Sudan's rarest case of success in promoting access and participation but remains largely embryonic and sporadic. Cultural thinking, economic insecurity and social disadvantage immensely affect the way poor and rural households decide about investing in their girl children's education. There is need, therefore, to emphasize the intrinsic developmental value of education over and above the compulsion for productivity and employability. It is audaciously mistaken to establish that gender inequality could be altered by education or within the education system without restructuring sexual division of labour in the home and the market at large. To achieve gender equality in their education systems, Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan must decode the cultural capital of their social classes and use that knowledge to empower women and girl children at the family and community levels while schools offer prospect. If these initiatives could be further institutionalised, resourced, and embedded in durable policy visions, it is possible for schools to become standard for broader societal transformation.

**Keywords:** Gender, education, equality, milieu, comparison, feminism, salience.

### INTRODUCTION

This is a theoretical paper with a charge to examine the scope and character of gender equality [1] in the education systems of Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan through a review of cross-national literature using feminist lens [1].

Gender is the set of social and cultural differences society has constructed between men and women; and gender equality is, therefore, the deliberate effort to ensure both men and women are in an equitable position to enjoy any range of valued goods, benefits, resources and opportunities as may socially accrue in a given context [2]. Education here refers with a loose knot to formal learning in institutions [3]. Today, across the world and in Africa, "for many girls, gender inequality is a feature of both their lives and their experience of education.....The combination of

extreme poverty and having younger siblings or being an orphan or foster child, still leads to very high dropout rates regardless of gender" [4, 5].

The paper as such seeks to assess where pronounced gaps have prompted specific legal and policy measures to address gender inequalities in the education systems of the three East African countries [6]. The cross-national thrust of the study is informed by my interest in investigating how the social phenomenon of gender inequality in education is systematically typical to each country in question; and at the same time using their collective national milieus as an appropriate setting to examine "problems, issues, and theory and methods" about gender and education at large [7, 8]. The importance of girl children starting and completing primary school in Africa cannot be overstated. "There is an increasing consensus that the

completion of primary education and the subsequent participation in secondary education or vocational training makes the difference between depending on subsistence agriculture and informal trade, or being able to become a socially, economically and geographically mobile member of the modern labour force" [5].

In addition to this section on introduction, the paper covers the methods of study, a review of related literature, discussion of notions of salience about gender inequalities in Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan, and a critique of intersections in understanding and explaining gender in education. A note on conclusion is served alongside these ponderings.

## STUDY METHODS

The study uses documentary research method [ii] to review the scope of gender gaps in school attendance and completion mainly in the primary and secondary education as well as the tertiary education level of the three countries [9]. Three objectives are pertinent to the focus of this study:

- To assess the manner in which gender inequality in educational attainment has become an issue of national concern to Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan;
- To highlight the legal and policy frameworks triggered by these countries' respective disparities in gender equality in education; and
- To map out the practical measures Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan have taken to address gender inequalities in their education systems.

The study uses the inscribed text of secondary documents such as publications, policy statements, statistical bulletins, records, information briefs, research reports and consultancy reports to gain indirect access to the thoughts and actions of Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan with respect to identifying and interpreting their connotations about gender equality in education [10].

It is stating the obvious that one could only fairly make sense of the subject of this study by locating it within a "theoretical context [iii]." In any case it is a must if one is to explain and interpret gender inequalities as macro-social variations. In doing so, it is to be recalled that the social scientist uses theory to help him/her regard as prime the subject of the study, rather than focus on the object of the research itself. The theoretical context of choice in this regard is, therefore, comparative and "social science disciplinary based", embellished by the thrust of feminism as an emancipatory notion of change [10, 7, 8].

Comparative education is brought into play here so as to account for the cross-national perspectives and thus secure units of analysis that lend themselves to

data aggregation across Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan [11]. Together, it is hoped that these conceptual frameworks would help to "unpack the intersections and inter-linkages between social and economic aspects of exclusion" [iv] when the issue of gender inequalities comes to the fore as the study unfolds [12].

In short, the study will methodically opt for an "overview of policies and measures in place in (Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan) with respect to gender equality in education" [6].

## A REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON GENDER EQUALITY

The literature on gender equality is permeated by gender inequalities; a paradox at its best, to the chagrin of scholars investigating this phenomenon. On an untroubled note, it is this very absurdity that has given impetus to achieving gender equality; a goal that remains largely out of sight in many countries and regions of the world simply because the institutional practices and social relations that buttress and prolong disparities are either hardly challenged or inadequately changed [2]. This standpoint applies across cultures and has held true at different historical times, buoyed in the past by a volume of literature depicting women as being inferior to men [6].

Gender equality, like other forms of equality across the ages, is deeply a historical movement of immense social significance. There are two historical approaches to viewing gender equality in education: conservative and progressive approaches. The conservative approach is time-honoured and argues that gender or sex difference [v] is defined by biology, nature and as such is simply unchanging. Education should, therefore, aim at socialising the young to take up their "accepted" roles as men and women respectively. Men are carved out to be breadwinners, oriented to work and are normally heads of the family. Women, by contrast, are destined to nurture, care and spend a great deal of their energy and enthusiasm on family-oriented endeavours [6]. The ploy is to designate masculinity as an expression for "the feminine object, violence, and authority. On the feminine side, these include the desire to be the object of masculine desire, physical vulnerability, and compliance" The manner in which the conservative view sees these as relational confirms that gender is "a property of individuals" [13].

The progressive approach negates the above and instead points out that gender is "a set of practices" and that the roles of men and women in life are shaped by the forces of history, culture and society in a constant process of change [13, 6]. Thus, the urge of men to relegate women to positions of subordination stems from a wilful interpretation of women's

biological difference in ways that suit men's designs and claims on superiority.

For example, when women and girls exhibit "masculine" attributes, they are dismissed as "deviant". "For masculinity to remain a legitimate property of men, feminine access to it must be denied. Masculinity is superior and desirable. Therefore, masculinity cannot "sustain" stigma and contamination-only femininity can [vi]" [13]. Hence, it is naturally understandable for proponents of the progressive school to see in education an effective tool for confronting these stereotyped assumptions embedded in dualism; as well as fostering greater equality between men and women. "The emphasis of this perspective is to understand gender or sex difference as a cultural phenomenon, arising out of the dominant idea of a particular era" [6].

There is a particular strand of social thought that has taken up the call for spreading progressive ideals with regard to gender issues in education. It is the feminist school of thought which springs from a marked commitment to provide access to "woman as a category; to political, economic and social equality of women", drawing on and triggering an ecumenical movement of theorists, philosophers, scholars and campaigners [6].

Feminism itself has come in three main waves as its import becomes more pronounced in issues about gender in education. It is historically pertinent that the first wave should address the then pressing issue of voting rights and access to welfare education for women during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This laid the groundwork for the subsequent progress as the second-wave feminists continued in the 1960s and 1970s to widen the scope of access to political, economic and social benefits alongside striving for greater equality and dignity for women in matters of paid working conditions, domestic work, spousal cruelty, sexuality and reproductive health [6].

The third wave is an incremental testimony to the preceding struggles as it has since the 1990s taken up the task of promoting women's agency and autonomy against a backdrop of stifling social restrictions. The defining feature of this era is the greater role played by the academia in largely bypassing the macro-social policies typical of the first two waves and instead, settling on nuanced micro-viewpoints of the embedded interplay of context and power relations in gender disparities [6].

Skelton & Francis [14] have taken issue with the third-wave feminists' little appetite for macro-policies, charging that it explains why education policy makers and practitioners might not see any use in the same. For all intents and purposes, the micro-social

perspectives espoused by the third wave have borne fruits among which is the notion and practice of gender mainstreaming, a process that identifies and accounts for the needs and interests of men and women in policies, programmes and practices [2]. This is a phenomenal success of the third wave of feminism, particularly in thrashing out gender issues across aspects of life.

To cascade the feminist struggle onto education will take three distinct forms. First, it is *political*, essentially highlighting the feminist movement to enhance the wellbeing and opportunities of girls and women in public life. Second, the feminist struggle for education is *critical*, intellectually critiquing male forms of knowing and doing that are detrimental to female emancipation. Third and last, it is *practice-oriented*, garnering support for the cause of equality by developing and practising professional and personal ethics. These three forms of feminist struggle for gender equality in education serve as the yardsticks for measuring "the differential achievement of girls and boys (particularly in the 'power' subjects of Mathematics and Science), the stereotyped subject and career choices made by girls and boys and different 'equality' pedagogies that might be used" [6].

But there are other similar perspectives, too, that address the question of gender equality in education. The first one comes from Wood [15] who argues that education cannot singlehandedly be an instrument to provide equal life-chances to boys and girls because influences outside the school such as family income and cultural expectation might work against equality *in* school. He also bases his argument on a simple fact of life where everybody has to compete for scanty opportunities; pointing out that those with big family income and enjoying affinity with schooling usually start out at the pole position in the race. His proposal is, therefore, to separate educational attainment from social origins as a viable measure of equality of opportunity [15].

The second perspective follows closely on the heels of the first and chooses instead to expand the meaning of equality of opportunity. It distinguishes between *formal opportunities* (as equality accrues from the presence of structure for access); *actual opportunities* (where equality is actualised with family background, orientation of school and quality of teaching affecting children's consumption of educational opportunities); and *outcomes* (where equality is assessed through the available slots that have been taken up by learner groups). This perspective offers a cascade of the scope of equality in operational terms. The third and last perspective doesn't differ a lot, if anything. It presents three pillars that are required to capture gender equality in education. These are *equal*

*treatment* (espousing non-discrimination in education vision and provision); *positive action* (affirmation of change through offering alternative platforms for disadvantaged groups such as women); and *gender-sensitive policy analysis* (consciously embedding gender equality in governance and culture at the institutional level). This sums up the most recent perspective on approaching the issue of gender equality in education [6].

Having reviewed the related literature in a sketch, it is easy to see the study needs a fusion of the second and third perspectives as a breakdown of the feminist theoretical basis of promoting gender equality in education through political, critical and practice-oriented commitment by countries and communities. Let us now turn to discuss gender equality in education across Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan from affirmative action to holistic approaches as may be exposed by the theoretical glare of the study. In that lies the need to slot in compelling notions of salience.

### **Gender Inequalities & Notions of Salience**

This sub-section discusses the impact of feminism's third wave on gender equality in the three countries' education systems. One of the most successful strategies of feminists is to "make inequality so visible that the introduction of a compensatory measure is seen as imperative" [6].

In the following three sub-headings, we shall demonstrate how traces of the political, critical and practice-oriented thrust of promoting gender equality in education are visible in the milieus of Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan.

### **Formal Opportunities for Equal Treatment**

The overarching need of Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan has been to guarantee equality of opportunity for all by providing formal structures for access and participation and espousing non-discrimination as a cornerstone of their school systems.

Perhaps, the best cliché for this is that "all students have an equal right to access". This has necessitated the three countries to use their political tools to create gender policies and develop strategies for improving educational outcomes for girl children.

Uganda stipulates in its National Constitution that every Ugandan has a right to education. This stipulation has underscored the need for devolution of powers to local authorities in order to implement the clause on education as a right. Hence, the Local Government Act 1997 entrusts local governments in the country with providing primary and secondary education to the populace. This administrative consideration is further reinforced by the Education Bill

2006 which is a revised edition of the Education Act 1970 and offers a structural framework for managing education in the country [16]. Apart from the legal dictates, Uganda's Vision 2040 "commits government to ensure that girls are kept in school and improve completion rates by addressing institutional, gender and cultural barriers to education." It is in this spirit that the second National Development Plan (NDP II) 2015/16-2019/20 expressly pursues greater equality of access to education for all [17]. Uganda made important international commitments towards the Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015) and the Education for All Goals which called for all boys and girls to complete a full course of primary education by 2015; and eradicating gender disparities at the primary level by 2005 and at all levels by 2015 [17].

These legal and political provisions were a major milestone in Uganda's arduous transition from conflict in the late 1990s during which massive gender disparities were registered in enrolment and attainment. These discrepancies in parity were essentially a product of the social norms and cultural practices of Uganda's patriarchal set-up [18]. The country had had bouts of social upheavals and military unrest which drastically caused huge economic downward spiral, wreaked havoc on the existing social infrastructure and undermined its education system during the period between 1979 and 1985 [19].

The National Resistance Movement (NRM) fought its way to power in 1986 and ten years later revealed a plan for Universal Primary Education (UPE); which was eventually rolled out in 1997. Since then access to education has increased substantially in Uganda [20].

Earlier in 1963 the Castle Commission Report laid the groundwork for equality of opportunity in education by calling for the expansion of girls' education in Uganda alongside increasing of technical and adult education and augmenting agricultural activities. The Commission's policy guidance in Uganda held sway until the coming of the Government White Paper on Education 1992 which now serves as the compass for the country's official purposes and programmes of education [17]. Having come thus far, Uganda's present educational policy is on "expanding the functional capacity of educational structures and on reducing the inequities [<sup>vii</sup>] of access to education between sexes, geographical areas and social classes" [18].

A grand plan known as the National Strategy for Girls' Education (NSGE) [<sup>viii</sup>] was initiated in 2000 to realise the goal of gender parity in the country's education system as stipulated in the Education Sector Investment Plan (1997-2003). The Government of the



Republic of Uganda set up a Gender Desk at the Ministry of Education & Sports (MoES) to coordinate and moderate the gender crusade [18, 21]. A steady flurry of activity followed and in 2007 the National Gender Policy came into being just in time to influence the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP 2007-2017). An offshoot of this strategic plan was the Gender in Education Policy (GEP) of 2009 which set out to mainstream gender in education and sports across Uganda [22].

Rwanda is quite similar to Uganda, albeit more tenacious and, perhaps, more conscious of the dangers of gender inequalities in its schools and society at large. The National Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda contains a celebrated text on gender equality and allocates women 30% of all positions in the country's power hierarchy [ix]; stipulating that gender mainstreaming is mandatory for all state and non-state actors in the country. In 2008 Rwanda put forward its Girls' Education Policy (GEP) which took shape in concrete terms through the subsequent Girls' Education Strategic Plan (GESP) of 2009 which embodies affirmative action [23].

The basic tenet of Rwanda's legal and political provisions for gender equality is the notion of empowerment; meaning providing Rwandans with greater control over their lives through more expanded choices [2]. True to its convictions, empowerment is the answer to the multiple factors slowing down girls' attainment such as the "gendered norm of female responsibility for household tasks that diverts time and attention from school/teaching, unplanned pregnancy which leads to increasing child care responsibilities and environments that discourage the participation of girls [24].

Rwanda is indeed "gender-progressive" in many ways. However, the functional capacities of administrative organs of the Government such as the Ministry of Education (MINEDU), Rwanda Education Board (REB) and the lower levels of local government have been called into question with regard to desired communication and implementation of GESP 2009 [24]. In a way, it all stands to reason. Rwanda has miraculously escaped from the clutches of its 1994 genocide and set out on a path of recovery and development in the midst of poverty, shortage of land, high fertility and little or no mineral resources. The unshakable will of its people is such that these constraints have been converted into turning away from an economy based on subsistence to one that is service-led and focuses on "investment in the quality of the nation's principal asset: its people" [5].

South Sudan's story in the fight for gender equality in education is surely different. It was part of

Sudan until July 2011 when it became an independent country. The old united Sudan had been at odds with itself since independence from British colonial power in 1956. It squandered 37 of its 47 years as one country on two civil wars between 1955-72 and 1982-2005. Education in its southern region was grossly neglected, little less talked about in terms of "equality of opportunity" at the peak of the wars. As a result, in 2002 over 75% of children attending primary school in southern Sudan had to walk on foot for at least 30 minutes to reach the nearest school. Thus, when South Sudan parted ways with Sudan in 2011 "easy access to school (has remained) the single most important factor affecting enrolment rates" for all, more so for girl children [25].

The liberation movement that fought for South Sudan's independence, the SPLM [x], only began to explore educational issues in areas under its control as late as 1994 when it held its first National Convention. One of the prime resolutions of the Convention was that education should provide self-reliance for the civil population under the SPLM during the raging civil war (1982-2005). This prompted more thought and therefore, action. In 2002 The SPLM Education Policy came out to conceptualise and formalise the ideals of education for the then southern Sudan. Noteworthy, the policy explicitly stressed "girls' education in order to achieve equality in education" [25].

Today, realising gender equality is grounded in the country's Transitional Constitution which considers equality as an unassailable right of all, including women. The Government launched a recovery & reconstruction bid in 2011 which recognised gender equality and empowerment of women as central to the quest for peace and development in the country. Known as the South Sudan Development Plan (2011-2013), it made a case for equality of opportunity in accessing social goods such as education [26]. To date, the most notable initiative of the Government with respect to this pledge is the "Go to School" campaign that has since 2006 enabled over 1.6 million boys and girls to enrol in schools across the country [27].

The above frantic doings by Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan are reflective of a wider international cause in Jomtein [28] to provide schooling to every child while simultaneously narrowing the gender gap by 2000; and in Dakar [29] to renew the pledge to educate all children and achieve gender parity by 2015 [30]. It is also informed by the harsh realities of women and girls in Africa at large. The bulk of poor women and girls live in rural Africa where they are actively engaged in agriculture and informal trade but visibly lack rights, resources and opportunities. In this regard, African countries added point when they adopted the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa in 2003; and later on,

the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa. Importantly, the Declaration offers an avenue for African governments to report on progress in gender equality annually [31].

But it is indeed the Beijing Platform for Action [32] that has set the tone for Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan and the rest of the world in addressing deep-seated barriers to equality of opportunity to both men and women. As far as gender equality in education is concerned, there is a clear call for action in changing curricula, addressing sexual harassment around the idea of school, equipping teachers with a new arsenal of gender-sensitive approaches and styles [4]. Alongside the political weight of the PFA 1995, the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) offers a rights-based perspective on girls' education as a basic human right [21].

Global development policy has had its share of influence on the imperative of girls' education as well. The overall direction of this policy is to underscore the importance of developing a nation's human resources including providing education to the female section of its population so as to boost economic efficiency and realise social welfare. The economic argument is

couched in terms of families or households deciding on the basis of costs and benefits to send their girls to school. This consideration of rates of return from investment in girls' education argues in favour of rational, maximal investment by households. The welfare argument follows closely behind and assigns value to positive externalities (social benefits not captured by individuals or households but by the larger society) that accrue from educating girl children. The "societal dividends" such as reduced fertility, improved health, increased income, greater productivity, and so forth, immensely outweigh male education; and, therefore, prompt proponents to argue that the state has to subsidize female education [33].

Subrahmanian [12] spells out the nature of these instrumental (economic) and intrinsic (welfarist) arguments in favour of girls' education. Countries like Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan have been driven by these rationales to invest in female education as a way to "move forward long-term development goals and improve both economic and social standards of living"; as well as to see gender equality in education as "key to securing intergenerational transfers of knowledge, and providing the substance of long-term gender equality and social change" [12].

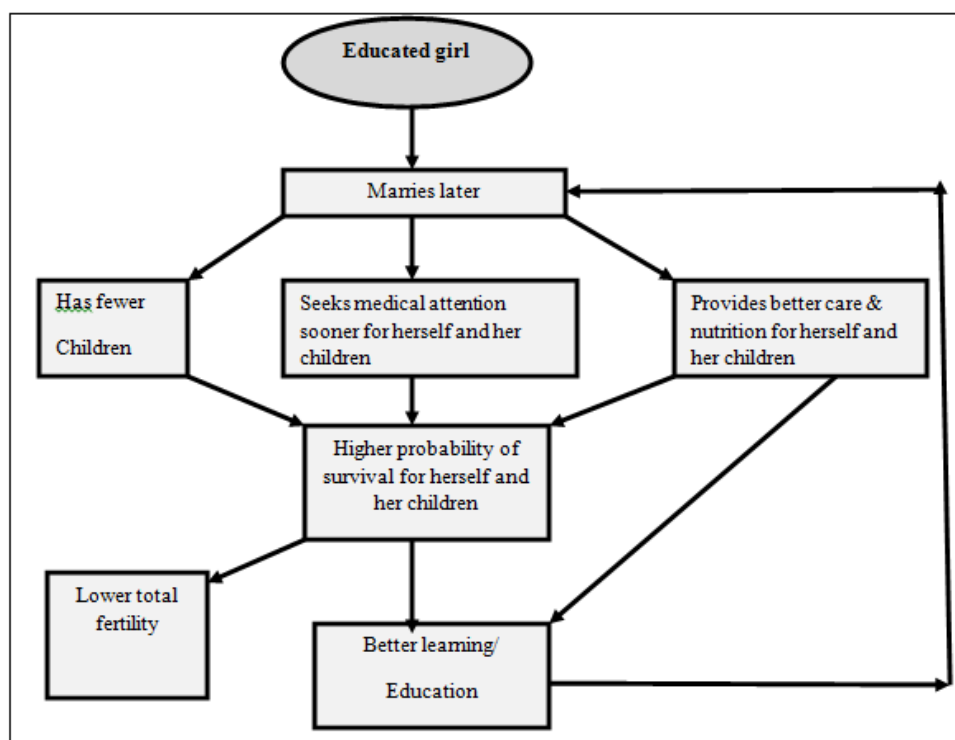


Fig-1: Generational Impact of Educating Girls; Johannes [30]

In sum, Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan have created an assortment of formal structures and provisions for gender equality in education. While Uganda and South Sudan have invariably sought to enact affirmative action geared at achieving increased

access for girl children, Rwanda has by and large focused on shifting from affirmative action to more holistic gender-responsive strategies in its gender equality crusade [34]. This, perhaps, is the most forceful impression of salience among the three East African

countries under study here. It confirms that formal opportunities for equal treatment of girl children do not as a matter of necessity ensure neither a shared starting point nor equal outcomes because of different cross-national milieus of change.

### **Actual Opportunities for Positive Action**

This sub-heading discusses the “actual” opportunities Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan have created for positive action in relation to gender equality in their education systems. They are direct derivatives of the formal structures put in place to promote gender and education. We shall look at each country’s initiatives and developments in addressing girls’ education; and highlight factors such as family background, orientation of school or quality of teaching that may have hindered their progress respectively.

In Uganda, the flagship of government initiative is the 1997 UPE which has since its launch spurred a big rise in the number of schools across the country. The initiative particularly required in 1997 that of the four children each family must send to school, two must be girls. The upshot was an initially slight but significant increase in girls’ primary school enrolment from 46% to 48%. Fewer girls dropped out from school (5.6%) in 1998 than they had done in 1995 (11%); and fewer primary school girls repeated class (6.3%) in 1998 than they had done in 1995 (17.7%) [18].

These celebrated figures came with an undercurrent of huge demands for highly qualified teachers to deliver on the promise of UPE. The Government scrambled a legion of untrained and unlicensed teachers to plug the gap but soon realised more harm was going to be done than good without an orientation scheme on gender equality. The Government thus introduced the Teacher Development Management Scheme (TDMS) to equip the teachers with gender dynamics in school settings and an essential understanding of the identities and relationships schoolchildren create [xii]. The TDMS proved to be a moderating force between the bluntness of policy making and the sharpness of community expectations [4].

A decade later, Uganda followed up on its 1997 UPE by introducing a Universal Post-Primary Education & Training (UPPET) program which has among other things refocused the education sector budget to allow a bigger share of resources for secondary education. In its launch year of 2007/08, 19% of public education resources were allocated to secondary education compared to 14% before the program [35].

Another major initiative rained down in the area of curriculum change. The Uganda National

Curriculum Development Centre (UNDC) has since 1992 embarked on periodic revision of the country’s primary school curriculum with a view to continually realigning it with gender-responsiveness. Seen as part of a bigger reform bid for primary education, this practice is also in line with the PFA 1995 calls for revising national curricula in light of gender considerations [18]. Furthermore, to boost female numbers in higher education institutions, Uganda has since 1991/92 has awarded 1.5 bonus points to all women applying for university education. The country’s premier institution of higher learning, Makerere University, witnessed a high rise in female candidates’ number from just 23% in 1989 to 41% in 2002 [18].

The country now focuses primarily on collecting and using gender-responsive indicators for the whole education sector. This drive includes repackaging data to suit diverse stakeholder needs and building up the Ministerial Gender Desk to aggregate and propagate education statistics [16].

Just next door in Rwanda, the assault on gender inequalities in education has continued unabated. Rwanda gave a lifebuoy to school dropouts to climb back into primary education through a remedial program set up in 2002. In 2003 the Government abolished school fees and brought in a food-for-education scheme to attract the most disadvantaged cohorts of children to school and keep them in school. The summation of all these efforts was the extension of the free education policy to 12 years, covering both 6 years of primary school and 6 years of post-primary education. This represents Rwanda’s biggest bid on promoting gender equality in education [5].

Another initiative to keep girl children in school is to take care of their sanitary needs at puberty. Rwanda now provides all its schools with funds to make sanitary pads available for girls who need them. This is coupled with a sustained campaign to root out gender violence in schools and around communities. Women and girls can reach out for help through a free-toll hotline for gender-based violence which is run by the police on behalf of the state. Teachers receive regular training on detecting signs of gender violence and reporting incidents to the police [23].

The country achieved gender parity in 2001 in its primary education. But it is less likely for girls in Rwanda to carry on with school through tertiary education and lead the education sector like their fellow Rwandans who happen to be men [24]. Rwanda recognises that while women make up the bulk of the teaching force at pre- and primary levels, men visibly outnumber them at secondary and tertiary levels respectively. The connotations of lower skills set and lower pay for the pre-primary and primary levels

therefore, place female teachers on a weaker technical and managerial standing as opposed to their male counterparts. For example, women account for 29% of head teachers of public primary schools, 16.7% head teachers of secondary schools and 5.9% rectors in public institutions of higher learning in Rwanda.

**Table -1: Gender Imbalances in Teaching Staff at Pre-Primary, Primary, Secondary & Tertiary Levels, Rwanda [23]**

Levels	No. of Female Teachers	%	No. of Male Teachers	%
Pre-Primary	2, 354	80%	537	20.0%
Primary	20, 786	51.6%	19, 513	48.4%
Secondary	5, 704	27.8%	14, 818	72.2%
Tertiary	483	18.7%	2, 100	81.3%

VSO [23]

Given its holistic approach to gender equality, Rwanda has since 2002 pioneered a Gender-Responsive Budget (GRB) in the region. This initiative targets improving gender-equality in education through a number of categories [4]. In GRB parlance, this would mean a three-fold budgeting: gender-targeted expenditures (for example, offering scholarships to girl children); staff-related employment-equity expenditures (such as offering more training resources for female teachers to scale the managerial ladder); and general/mainstream expenditures (like Uganda's example to allocate more resources to post-primary education where more male proportions may be incurred to the detriment of female learners or investing in pre-school to garner more benefits to women and girls such as less child care burden). This makes Rwanda a wonder [4].

In South Sudan, initiatives and developments for positive action are afoot, albeit embryonic and sporadic. The UNICEF-supported "Go to School" Initiative is South Sudan's rare case of success in promoting access and participation for all children.

Therefore, a string of measures has been set in motion to reverse this trend. These include an appointment mantra for head teachers on a 50-50 basis; and speeding up the promotion of women into senior management following their identification and coaching at entry or middle levels [23].

Nationwide school enrolment now stands at more than 1.6 million for primary schools compared to just 343, 000 before the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) ushered in a new era in 2005 [27]. But this is a country with just 8% of literate women [36]. Although teaching remains a truly female undertaking at the lower levels of schooling, South Sudan does not seem to have clear initiatives to forge an education management reality that is gender-balanced. In fact, its teacher education policy falls short of the rigour we have seen in Uganda's gender-inclusive professional development for school teachers [6].

One promising strategy the country should pursue to enrol and retain girls in school is to introduce and support basic community-based kindergarten and pre-school settings [25]. At any rate, South Sudan needs to muster its national resources, aim for quality and seek aid to achieve free primary and secondary education [1]. As Subrahmanian [12] has it, unless the quality of education provides incentives for education investment on the part of poor households, education participation rates are unlikely to change."

**Table-2: Higher Education Enrolment by Gender (%), South Sudan**

Year	University		Teacher Training Institutes		Technical & Vocational Education Institutes	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
2008	75	25	87	13	76	24
2009	78	22	76	24	73	27
2010	82	18	80	20	73	27

MoGCSW [26]

Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan have each a peculiar set of issues to grapple with in achieving gender equality in education. But they have commonalities when it comes to factors that stand in the way of positive action for girls' education. Three prominent factors are family background, orientation of school and quality of teaching.

The child's father is the most important decision-maker with regard to a child's enrolment in

Uganda, more so in rural areas and higher in the Northern Region of the country which also accounts for the poorest school attendance for girls in the country [19]. Barungi *et al.*, [35] note that "because of the traditional preference for boys over girls and low incomes, girls are less likely to stay in secondary schools" in Uganda. While the median age of first union is 18.9 for the cohort of women aged 20-24 years old, early marriage is still a rampant practice in the country [<sup>xiii</sup>] [37]. This confirms a review of literature



that the “earliest differences between boys and girls in attainment are revealed through falling behind in school and repetition of school years.....There is evidence that parents are more likely to keep their children in school if the children will be able to continue into the secondary phase” [6, 5].

There are similar manifestations in South Sudan where educating a girl is often perceived to cost more than doing the same for a boy. This perception springs from two types of costs: direct costs involving purchase of uniform or provision for safety where long distance is an issue; and indirect costs mainly accruing from the girl child’s labour in the household [33]. The Government would do well to cut back these costs so that parents can unleash their girl children. It could be done through reducing or abolishing school fees or “providing incentives and scholarships to help cover indirect and opportunity costs” [1] [xiv].

In Rwanda the girl child’s share of household chores almost certainly undermines her school attendance and performance by reducing her time for school work. A pregnant school girl in Rwanda will likely miss lessons for 6 months incurred during child birth and care; thereby, increasing her chances of repeating class. Moreover, it is quite hard for such a girl to resume schooling after child birth as is provisionally possible. In real practice, child care will force her family to drop her school resumption bid; buoyed probably by “the attitude of the community which frowns upon unmarried mothers going back to school” [23].

Apart from a girl’s family background, physical distance between home and school could have a decisive power over a girl’s access fortunes. In South Sudan, “the average distance from home to water points is 1.5 to 2kms in urban areas and 3-6 kms in rural areas” [38]. This proves a huge hindrance since girls fetch water as part of their household chores. Reducing the distance and adding more female teachers to school portfolios will have an impact on girl children’s participation [5, 12]].

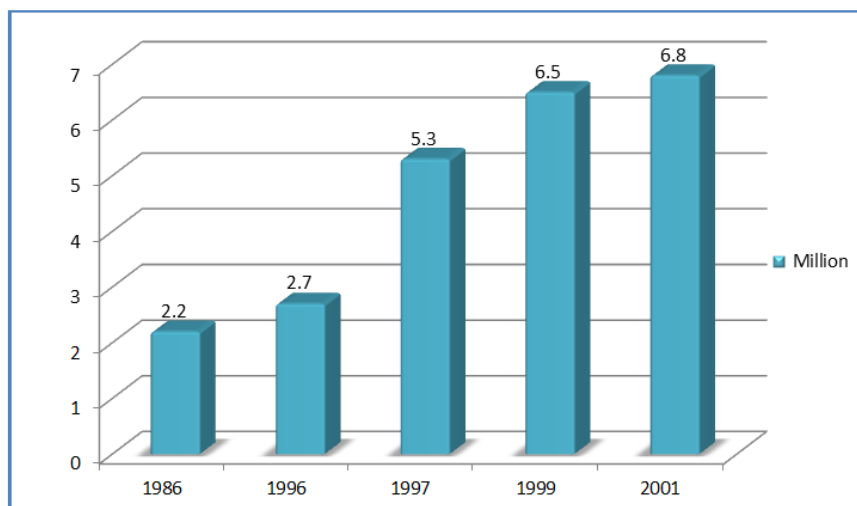
Other factors relating to schooling provision are also big on the screen of girls’ education. It is generally accepted that girls fare poorly in Mathematics and Science; and that the “most pronounced gender difference in achievement is the advantage of girls in reading” [9, 6] Quality of teaching and orientation of school are important factors for girls to come to the fore. For example, the way teachers perceive of male- and femaleness could affect how they relate to their pupils and generate equity perspectives As Aikman & Unterhalter [4] ascertain, “the culture of a school and its practices outside of formal lessons, for example, in the playground or during meal times, also affect how girls and boys learn.”

All in all, the slew of initiatives spelled out in the preceding sections speak testimony to the dynamism, or lack thereof, of Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan in cordoning off gender inequalities in their education systems. If these initiatives could be further institutionalised, rendered well-resourced, and duly grafted onto these countries’ stock of long-term policy visions, “the potential exists for schools to become a beacon and model for wider societal changes” in the quest for gender equality [4].

### **Outcomes for Gender-Sensitive Policy Analysis**

In this third and last stretch of sub-headings, we shall recount facts and figures about gains made by the three countries and present the relative merits of their girl children’s school attendance and performance.

In Uganda the 1997 UPE has fronted the case for girls to access and participate in education on an equal basis. Enrolment in primary schools hit 6.5 million (47% girls) in 2000 [18]. Uganda achieved gender parity on enrolment into primary education in 2014; while gains in enrolment of boys and girls at secondary school level have remained more or less the same at 54% and 46 % as of 2008 respectively. Tertiary education witnessed quite an increase of female candidates from 38% in 2002 to 44% in 2014 [22].



**Fig-2: Growth of UPE Enrolment, Uganda; Muhwezi [18]**

Between 2008 and 2014, completion rates for both sexes in primary education rose from 47% to 72%; with girls' pass rate at Primary Leaving Examination leaping from 65.3% in 2002 to 86.2% in 2014. Girls' score for numeracy at Primary 6 stood at 37.4% and that

of boys' was 45.8% in 2015. In 2014 boys' exam performance index was 6 percentage points higher than the one for girls at 54%. The survival rate of girls to Primary 7 was 32.9%, slightly lower than that of boys at 33.1% in 2015 [22].

**Table-3: Percentage of Girls to Candidates Sitting End of Level Exams, Uganda**

School Year	Candidates who sat PLE*		Candidates who sat UCE*		Candidates who sat UACE*	
	Both Sexes	% of Girls	Both Sexes	% of Girls	Both Sexes	% of Girls
2007	419, 206	48	189, 221	46	84, 821	41
2008	463, 631	49	196, 493	46	88, 383	41
2009	488, 745	49	212, 496	47	94,093	41
2010	490, 374	49	258, 196	46	99, 802	41
2011	514, 916	49	265, 561	47	102, 254	41

Primary Leaving Examination (PLE); Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE); Uganda Advanced Certificate of Education (UACE); Johannes [30]

In spite of the launch of Universal Secondary Education in 2007, Uganda had only been able to enrol 25 % of girl children who were supposed to be in secondary school by 2011. It is even more appalling that only 1 out of 3 girl children who go to secondary schools is still enrolled by the age of 18. In fact, as late as 2016, "69% of Ugandan adolescent girls have never attended secondary school despite the introduction of USE in 2007; yet 40% of girls aged 20-24 years were married before the age of 18 years [<sup>xiv</sup>]" [35, 22].

Rwanda has more high perks than any other country in the region or across Africa at large. "Girls progress through primary grades with less repetition and dropout than boys and tend to complete primary school in greater numbers at the correct age" [24]. In 2011, net enrolment rates for boys and girls stood respectively at 94.3% and 97.5% at primary school level and 24.2% and 27.2% for secondary education. These figures make the country's girls' access to primary and secondary education one of the best in Africa [23]. It is school completion, not enrolment, which poses the main

challenge to Rwanda. In 2008, only 54% of school-aged children made it to the exit point of primary education. The ominous high figures of repetition of about 15%<sup>xv</sup> are a cause for concern because repetition bogs down poor households and spells the likelihood of school drop-out. Furthermore, it can eat into budget lines meant for other educational needs. For example, "it is estimated that grade repetition and dropout consume about 25% of the financial resources allocated to primary education" in the whole of Africa. Rwanda's challenge is to focus on children from larger but disadvantaged families if it is to improve the completion rates of its primary education [5].

Rwanda has a situation where boys still outperform their girl counterparts in examinations. For instance, in 2010 primary school-leaving examinations, only 80.75% of girls passed compared to boys' pass rate of 85%. It is even more pronounced in lower secondary school where boys outperformed girls at 91.6% against 78.2%; and further up the ladder in senior secondary school where boys passed at 90.6% at the exit point and

girls only fared at 83.8% [5]. In 2013 boys made the transition to secondary school at 74.1% compared to that of girls at 73.8% [24]. Rwanda is putting together an affirmative action regime that will hopefully offer remedial courses to girls deemed at risk of underperforming or exiting; assisting girls in the “power” subjects of science and technology through mentorship in secondary and higher education; and facilitating easy re-entry of girls who become pregnant along the journey of schooling [5].

South Sudan’s total population is about 12 million, yet 2 million of its primary school-aged children, mainly in rural areas, are yet to go to school. That is, 70% of children aged 6-17 have never been in a classroom. This is particularly understandable since just 13% of primary schools provide the full cycle of primary education, grades 1-8, in the country mainly due to gross infrastructure deficits and weak technical capacities in primary education provision. For example, 32% of primary school learning spaces are open-air and only 35% of classrooms at this level are housed in permanent buildings. Only 2% of primary schools have supply of electricity and almost two thirds lack safe drinking water [27, 36].

Girls make up only 33% of children in primary schools of South Sudan where the overall completion rate for boys and girls is a paltry 10%. Women make up 51.6% of the poor in South Sudan and suffer from low social status, rampant child marriage and high maternal mortality [38]. “Only 18% of children who enrolled in Grade 1 are still in school by Grade 8”. According to Sudan Household & Health Survey 2010, and EMIS 2011, net primary enrolment rate was 44%, with boys accounting for 51% and girls garnering 37%. Gender parity index for primary school stood at 0.59 [27, 36, 38].

Children enrolled in secondary education are about 57, 000 with girls “only half as likely as boys to attend secondary school...Just 13% of primary school teachers and 10% of secondary school teachers are female, reinforcing gender inequalities”. Textbooks are not adequate for secondary schoolchildren with the pupil-textbook ratio standing at 3:1 [36]. In 2009, girls made up just 26.3% of secondary school children [<sup>xvi</sup>] and 24 % of higher education and teacher education candidates respectively [38].

In Sum, Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan all struggle with low girl intake particularly in secondary education. This regional phenomenon reflects the larger trend across the continent of Africa which has “the lowest level of lower secondary participation (45%) compared to other regions (West Asia 69%; Europe, South America 100%; East Asia and Oceania greater than 90%) [1] [xiv]. African girls, according to Aikman

& Unterhalter [4] achieve an average school attendance of just 2.82 years before they attain the age of 16!

Primary education participation is also a problem in tropical Africa which makes up the largest part of the continent. “At the current rate of progress, gender parity, that is equal numbers of boys and girls in primary education, in Sub-Saharan Africa will not be reached until 2038”. One disadvantaged group that has missed out on basic education as a basic human right is the group of nomads or pastoralists. Across the globe Uganda and Mongolia qualify as the only two countries that have substantially addressed pastoralist education since 1990 in Jomtein [4].

### **An Intersection of Critiques**

Having discussed the fortunes of gender equality in the education systems of Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan at length, it is meaningful to add a layer of critique to the preceding three units of analysis.

The attempt throughout the section on discussion has been to assess national gender policies for education on a solid feminist theoretical footing, rather than in reference to world scales or hierarchies [39]. This brings us to the first intersection in need of critique. While the contemporary dash for realisation of efficiency in schooling is a piercing debate, more needs to be said about its implications for promoting gender equality in education in countries like Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan [12].

Apparently, “reducing the costs of providing education for all without compromising equity”, or quality for that matter, is easier said than done because governments’ formal opportunities for equal treatment in education are basically undermined by having to walk a tight rope at the same time between driving equity and cutting back costs at the dictates of macroeconomic policies<sup>xvii</sup>. It is therefore, likely that countries like Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan could either aggravate gender inequalities or create even more vicious forms of inequality elsewhere in the value chain. It is, therefore, prudent that their gender profiles should reflect their citizens’ decisions about household education investments which in turn are subject to patterns of cultural thinking, economic insecurity and social disadvantage, particularly in rural areas. “Policies for raising revenue, whether through taxation or through charging user fees, have implications for the equity challenge”; and, by extension, girls’ education [12].

The second issue up on the list of critique is the instrumentalist view of education put forward by the economic justification for investment in girls’ education. Parents from poor, rural households in Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan have in many

respects obviously opted to under-invest in their girls' education despite claims that the rates of return to education are similar for both boys and girls. It is critical that the linear narrative of "dividends" be moderated by appreciating structural and cultural factors such as the "aggregated demand for labour, costs of delivering school services, regulations and incentives in education systems" and failure to value the "increased productivity of females" weigh differently in each and every country. Equally important is the need to emphasize the intrinsic developmental value of education for African girls than the compulsive hyping of productivity and employability [33]. In the words of Manion [40], gender parity is now easier to promote *in* education than it is to achieve gender equality *through* education because the economic justification for girls' education risks belittling the need to delve deeper into the real causes of gendered inequalities in society. The result is that "policy solutions designed and implemented tend to work *with* rather than *against* the status quo" [40] [iii].

The third intersection of critique is at the human capital theory [<sup>xviii</sup>] which is often used to make the case for education as basic to the creation of skills upon which individuals' social position would highly depend. To situate the imperative for gender equality in education within this premise is to argue that girls' education will open up conditions of perfect competition and reward for the girl child once she attains her margin of productivity. What we know for a fact is that this sharply contrasts with the reality of gendered norms. Firstly, education systems of countries like Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan depend primarily on reproducing the family group and to a much lesser extent on the demands of the production system. This is simply because societies are set up to distribute reproduction work unequally. That is why we have situations of unequal pay, unequal access to jobs, and so forth. Thus, it is audaciously erroneous to assert that this "social inequality could be altered *by* education or *within* the education system" without correspondingly restructuring sexual division of labour in the home and the economy at large [3]. Secondly, we know for a fact in societies like that of Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan the prestige of reward often depends on the ascription of gender to an occupation than on the occupation per se. This shows that societies are set up to evaluate men and women unequally.

It is, therefore, critical that the use of the human capital theory should not gloss over the essence of inequality which is gendered [3]. For example, an individual's cultural beliefs about gender may bias their perceptions of competence and thus control their actual ability to project themselves as suitable for certain careers [41]

The fourth and last intersection of critique builds on the preceding one. Bourdieu argues in his social reproduction and cultural capital theory that a given education system tends to reward the culture of the dominant class [<sup>xix</sup>] in society [42]. Thus, people tend to develop their habitus (one's disposition which affects the actions one takes) instinctively in early childhood based on their place in the social structure. It is this habitus that couples with the structure of available opportunities to determine the type of one's class-based aspirations, causing gendering of cultural capital [<sup>xx</sup>]. To achieve gender equality in their education systems, Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan must decode the cultural competence of their social classes and use that knowledge to empower women and girl children at the family and community levels while schools proffer possibility.

## CONCLUSION

The paper has at length assessed the manner in which gender inequality in educational attainment has become an issue of national concern to Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan; highlighted the legal and policy frameworks triggered by these countries' respective disparities in gender equality in education; and modestly mapped out the practical measures Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan have taken to address these inequalities.

A cross-national theoretical study of this nature is bound to be meta-analytic, interpreting the outcomes and differences of each country's campaign for gender equality in education; and portraying how a particular national education policy works in terms of equity in comparison with regional peers. It goes without saying that a more equal gender system must prevail when all is said and done in Uganda, Rwanda and South Sudan. Whether this will be accounted for by the primacy of an education system or beyond its confines is a legitimate question. Either way, girls must go to school and complete schooling at the correct age.

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## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> "Equality as an educational aim is largely a 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon. Before then, education was seen as a means of preparing different groups for their station in life (as leaders, bureaucrats, workers and mothers)" (EACEA, 2010: 20).

<sup>ii</sup> "The documentary method is a set of techniques used to categorise, investigate, interpret, and identify the limitations of physical sources, most commonly written documents whether in the private or public " (Mogalakwe, 2006: 221-22).

<sup>iii</sup> "It is the theory that re-orders the data, and inferences come as a matter of interpretation of the raw material informed by theory" (Mogalakwe, 2006: 228).

<sup>iv</sup> "Apart from the injustice inherent in all gender stereotypes, gender differences in education can also negatively affect economic growth and social inclusion" (EACEA, 2010: 3).

<sup>v</sup> "One of the most often researched areas related to gender in education is the issue of sex differences, i.e. comparing male and female characteristics and performance. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) reviewed 1, 400 research studies on sex differences and concluded that while some patterns persist, for example, female superiority in verbal skills and male superiority in mathematical skills, it is difficult to untangle the influence of stereotyping on individuals' perceptions of behaviour towards events and objects, and also to separate if, and to what extent, innate or learned behaviours underpin the development of behavioural or cognitive sex differences" (EACEA, 2010: 22).

<sup>vi</sup> "Male-dominated society expects women and girls to be submissive, shy and subordinate and objects of male sexual pleasure; so that is the role that women and girls adopt" (VSO, 2013: 4).

<sup>vii</sup> Gender equity is a situation where distribution of resources and rewards between women and men has taken into account their differences and the different

forms of social discrimination they may face (Oxfam, 2017).

<sup>viii</sup> The strategy sought to address factors such as school orientation, economic conditions, social expectations and administrative apathy which were considered as the most vexed barriers to girls' education in the country (MoES, 2013).

<sup>ix</sup> "As a result, above 30% of Senators, 40% of Ministry Permanent Secretaries and Supreme Court Judges, 83.3% of all Vice Mayors of Social Affairs and 56.3% of Parliamentarians are women" (VSO, 2013: 2).

<sup>x</sup> Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

<sup>xi</sup> It was adopted by the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in 1995 at Beijing, China.

<sup>xii</sup> "Teachers are encouraged to see their pupils both as sons and daughters of parents with particular views about education, and as boys and girls with rights and obligations" (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2007: 33).

<sup>xiii</sup> "Traditional and religious perceptions about women and gender socialisation perpetuate an imbalance of power and status and low value attached to women and girls" (JICA, 2017: 21).

<sup>xiv</sup> "25% of teenage girls were reported to have had children according to data from the 2006 UDHS.....Statistics from the UNICEF indicate that 35% of teenage girls are either pregnant or have already had their first child" (MoES, 2013: 15).

<sup>xv</sup> The benchmark for repetition according to the Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) is 10%.

<sup>xvi</sup> "These figures improved slightly in 2011, to 39% of primary students and 30.2% of secondary school" (JICA, 2017: 33).

<sup>xvii</sup> For instance, "secondary education has been overshadowed for more than two decades as primary education has been supported and promoted as a basic human right and as a cost-efficient investment for development" (Sutherland-Addy, 2008: xiv).

<sup>xviii</sup> "The core assertion of the concept of human capital is that investment in education increases future monetary income of people" (Kupfer, 2014: 118).

<sup>xix</sup> "The acquisition of cultural capital and consequent access to academic rewards depend on the cultural capital passed down by the family, which in turn, is largely dependent on social class" (Dumais, 2002: 44).

<sup>xx</sup> Cultural capital is "comprised of the linguistic and cultural competence and a broad knowledge of culture that belongs to members of the upper classes and is found much less frequently among the lower classes" (Dumais, 2002: 44).