

Gender Differences in Education Attainment (Enrollments and Graduations) in Albania. Main Issues and Challenges

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Abstract *The education level is a highly important indicator that tells about the women and girls status in the Albanian society. Statistical data show that in Albania, girls are more successful than boys in all levels of education. Although girls represent the largest number of enrollments and graduations in all levels of education, as well as give a very significant contribution to the education domain, their social and economic status leaves a lot to be desired. The big surprise of the past few decades has been women's huge advance into tertiary education. Crucially, women's lead at first-degree level does not so far seem to have translated into better job opportunities. There are certainly other factors affecting here apart from the education, like the economic and cultural level, mentality, tradition, media stereotypes, division of power on gender basis, legislation, geographical location, place of residence, etc. This paper focuses on gender differences in educational achievements as well as gender differences in the educational system, based on the fact that education is known worldwide as a significant indicator of a society's social and economic development. Literature review and statistical data analyzed have been main methods used in preparing this paper. The universal argument that women's and girls' education reduces poverty's transmitting from a generation to the next is very important, because it enhances their capacity aiming the socialization of the coming generation, as well as increases their potentials to contribute in social, economic and political aspects of the national development, augments the need for conducting research in this field.*

Introduction

Education is society's leading instrument through which to achieve social change. Education it is not related solely with ensuring sufficient schools, textbooks, and qualified teachers. It is related to a certain social context, which should be seen as a right of everyone, whereby individuals have the possibility to improve their social and economic well-being and take part in public life.

Statistical data indicate that girls are more successful than boys at all levels of education in Albania (INSTAT, 2010). Although girls make up for the largest part of enrolments and graduations at all levels of schooling, as well as make a significant contribution to the area of education, their social and economic status leaves much to be desired. Certainly, this is affected also by other factors, aside from education, such as the economic and cultural level, mentality, tradition, the media, stereotypes, gender division of work, legislation, geographical area, residence, etc.

Women's education is particularly important if we take into consideration their social reproductive role (Gender Alliance for Development Center, 2004). "Educated women" have smaller families, with fewer infants dying during birth, and surviving infants being healthier and better educated. Furthermore, educated women are better prepared to enter into the labor market.

By means of education, a society can minimize inequalities between men and women as well as between other social groups. In reality, there are considerable gender inequalities in the education sector. These inequalities are based not only on indicators such as illiteracy, school attendance, academic achievement in school, but also on other aspects of education that have to do with gender equality and justice, for instance, the content and reform of education curricula and teacher-student interaction (Dhamo. M., Sinani. M., Gjermani. E., Sulstarova. A., Sinani. J., & Dauti. M., 2005). Furthermore, recent research on gender and education have concluded that in many countries, Albania included, education and its numerous aspects such as classroom interaction, programs, curricular framework, academic achievements in school, teacher attendance and training, institutional environment, etc., play a significant role in preserving or conveying gender inequalities (Gender Alliance for Development Center, 2006).

Gender mainstreaming in education importance

Arguments related to justice (Neimanis. A., 2004): The process of gender mainstreaming in education is important also as part of the obligations of the Albanian state, in the context of ratified national and international documents; here we may mention: Constitution of Albania, Law on Gender Equality in the Society, National Strategy on Gender Equality,

Millennium Development Goals, Beijing Platform for Action, Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Conference Beijing + 10, etc. Numerous international instruments and agreements oblige states that have ratified them to ensure gender equality in general and in the area of education in particular. Article 10 of the CEDAW Convention specifically emphasizes, "State Parties should ensure quality between females and males at all levels of education." The fundamental human rights principles are very clearly noted with regard to universal rights to education as a basic right for every individual. Every government should be responsible for ensuring sustainable development and social justice for all individuals that are part of the society they live in.

Various research studies indicate that "gender inequality has a negative impact on a country's economic development." This is due to the fact that if women and men do not have the same level of education in a society, then the state itself is not able to capitalize on the entire human potential and productivity, thus leaving this process deficient and one-sided. Besides, sexual division or gender differences in education lead inevitably to gender differences in employment. The integration of both sexes in all aspects of development creates the opportunity to make use of all human resources, skills, contributions, and values they carry, thus ensuring an efficient, complete, and sustainable development for the entire society.

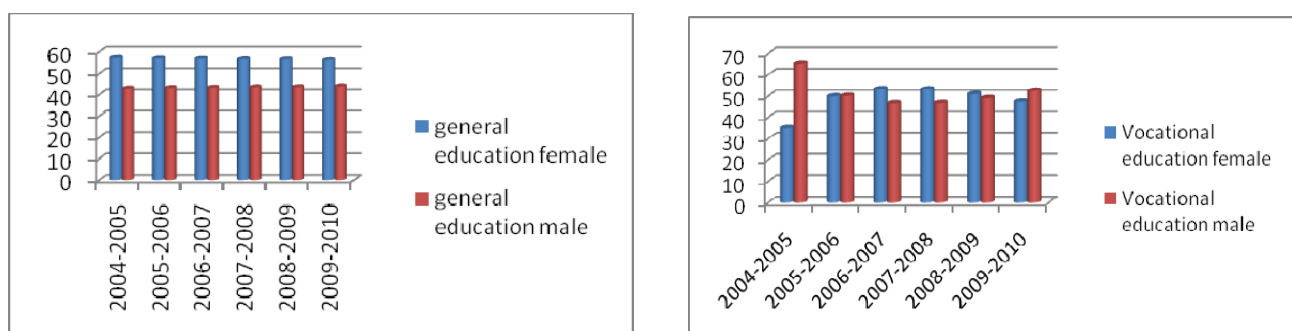
The chain reaction argument (Neimanis. A., 2004). There is an intrinsic correlation between gender division in the labor market and the one in the area of education. One example that illustrates this fact is that most of the girls study in areas such as: teaching, social sciences, economics, nursing, etc. These are areas in which professions are paid less than those for which boys study. Likewise, we may mention the least paid sectors that are dominated by females, such as education, health, or social services. The same fact may be used for women heads of families, who have lower levels of income than men heads of families. Should we want to narrow gender inequalities in the labor market, change should start from the educational system and its levels. Gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles are inherited from generation to generation, but often these are not considered an obstacle in creating a society where gender equity prevails. Such stereotypes may limit human capital considerably with regard to expectations that women or men have for themselves or the expectations the society has for them. Due to the consequences produced by gender stereotypes, addressing them in the educational system as early as possible and in a sustainable form may help break this cycle.

Gender sensitive data may be practical tools for gender mainstreaming in education, because information that may be obtained through them may be used to encourage initiatives undertaken in order to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment.

Gender Approach to Situation of Education in Albania

Education is the area that has seen good achievements in terms of access for women and is a value that traditionally has been highly esteemed by the Albanian society. The high educational level of Albanian women and girls demonstrates quite well that they are successful and that education to them is key to achieving a better status in the family and the society. Statistical data according to INSTAT publication "Females and Males in Albania" and the official data of the Ministry of Education and Science, indicate that at all levels of education, girls are more successful than boys. According to education statistics, at the end of every school year, female pupils and students are more than males, although at the start of every school year, more boys are enrolled than girls. In 2010, 49,766 pupils completed and graduated from 9-year education, of which 49% girls and 51% boys. In tertiary education, the number of females, 54%, remains higher than that of males, which is at 46%. In vocational tertiary education, males dominate with 69% of those enrolled.

Graphic 1: Graduation in tertiary education, by type of education (general and vocational) in percentages



Source: Ministry of Education 2011

If we were to look at data by type of high school (general and vocational), the gender gap in the number of graduates is in favor of women and remains unchanged through the years by about 7%. The situation is quite the reverse in vocational school graduations, with a gender gap in favor of males by about 5%; however, there is a growing trend in the number of female graduates through the years in this type of education. Trends through the years in the number of enrolment and graduation in tertiary education indicate that more boys enroll, but there is a greater tendency of girls graduating, mainly in general tertiary education.

Females in higher education make up for 56,4% of the total number of full time students in academic year 2007-2008 (INSTAT, 2010). In various faculties, the ratio female-male varies. If we look at the structure according to 8 broader study themes in full time education, we notice that females are more inclined to pursue studies in social sciences. In this area, females makeup for 73% of students in the area of education, 68% of students in the area of health, and 61% of students in the humanities and arts. Males take up the largest share of students in the area of engineering, with 70% as well as the natural sciences, with priorities changing compared to the previous year in that they represented the majority of students also in agriculture. In 2008, full time higher education female graduates represented 67%.

For the academic year 2009-2010, females in higher education represented 58% of the general number of full time students. Females make up for 78% of students in education, 71% of students in health, 65% of students in the humanities and social sciences, business, and law. Males continue to represent the majority of students in the area of engineering, with 74%, in agriculture and veterinary studies, with 66%, and in the area of services with 63%.

In the academic year 2009-2010, in full time higher education, females represented 66% of graduates in the I-st cycle (Bachelor), 59% in the II-nd cycle (Master and Second Level Diploma). In the Professional Master diploma, 1,501 females or 77% of the total number graduated 243 females, or 64% of the total number graduated in the Second Level Master.

Albanian women and girls make a major contribution in the area of education. Women's representation in the pre-university system (pre-school, 9-year, and secondary) is considerable. Female teachers represent 68% of the teaching staff in 9-year education; the percentage is at 61% in the private education sector. In public and private tertiary education, female teachers make up 62% of the teaching staff. In higher public education, the percentage of female teachers' increases every year, making up for 50.04% compared to 47.2 previously. In private higher education, female lecturers, with and without scientific titles, make up for 27.4% of the teaching staff.

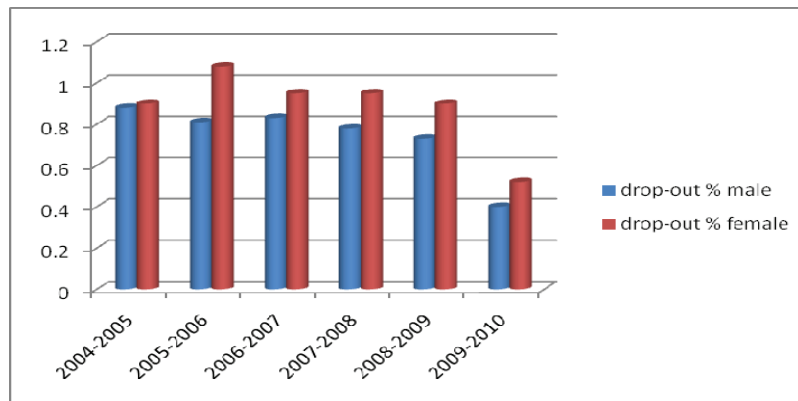
Although the number of women and girls graduating from higher education is larger than that of men and boys, and academic personnel has a higher percentage of women and girls, men dominate leading positions and academic titles.

For academic year 2009-2010, public higher education had 26.61% females with the "Associate Professor" title compared to 73.39% males; there were only 26.16% women compared to 73.84% men with the title "Professor."

In leading positions in the public higher education, there are 10 male rectors and no females; there are 10 male deputy rectors and 3 females; there are 29 male deans and 11 female; there are 105 male department heads and 47 female (Ministry of Education, 2011).

As in other areas of decision making, there are a series of factors that influence the drop in the number of female senior officials in universities compared to males. Again, gender division of work, family responsibilities, mentality, socialization methods, opportunity to obtain information, qualifications, low self-esteem, etc., are directly linked with this phenomenon.

School dropout rates. While the graduation of girls from schools is at considerable levels, gender phenomena such as concrete dropouts or secret dropouts are present. We notice an abandonment of school by females both in absolute terms, and in percentages (Graphic 2). Other research by non-government organizations, although not national but focusing on certain regions, highlighted more problematic figures. Worn-out or inexistent infrastructure that leads to insecurity of travel, lack of safe sanitary facilities (toilets) and lack of drinkable water, are some of the factors leading girls to abandon school, or parents to remove girls from school. School abandonment is particularly evident in rural areas, where difficult economic conditions force children to abandon school in order to help their families with agricultural work. Besides, large-scale migration from rural areas to the cities has created problems with the availability of teaching staff (particularly in remote areas), and in overburdening schools in the cities and closing of schools in the rural areas.

Graphic 2: Percentage of dropout rates

Source: Ministry of Education (2011)

Dropout levels through the years indicates a lessening of the phenomenon; meanwhile, in the last academic year only, there is a narrowing of the gender gap, which will require further observation of it.

There are no studies indicating achievements by girls in basic writing and reading skills, or more, but reports by non-profit and community organizations indicate that the number of girls at risk of illiteracy is high (MOLSAEO, 2011-2015).

The former National Agency for the Evaluation of Pupils, now called National Agency of Tests, at the end of final state examinations, drafts and publishes every year: "Report of results of exit exams" and "Report of results of the state Matura." Data from the survey measuring the living standards (2008) notes that for the age group under 54 years, the illiteracy rate is generally higher among males than among females. On the other hand, there is concern in noticing that the lower the age, the higher illiteracy. Thus, while for the 45-54 age group illiteracy is at 1% and 0.5% for males and females respectively, for the 15-24 age group, figures rise to 1.8% and 1% respectively; for the 25-34 age group, the figures are even higher. A real challenge to school attendance are the "informal" costs of education, which impose on poor families a financial burden that may be related to children's not going to school, particularly in the country's rural and poorest areas. Furthermore, social and cultural reality upholds the conclusion that girls abandon school more often and earlier than boys to contribute to the family's economy, or to marry at a very young age.

Pursuant to the implementation of the strategy 2007-2010, public education has managed to take steps toward the institutionalization of gender equality (MOLSAEO, 2011-2015). The Curricular Framework of Pre-University Education has been reviewed from a gender standpoint, teaching standards have been reviewed from a gender standpoint, the gender equality criterion has been declared as one of the criteria for the selection of textbooks. The Curricular Framework of Pre-University Education and teaching standards combine education engagements for gender equality with other curricular elements, thus enabling the use of interactive methodologies in teaching. Interventions through manuals on gender equality have been introduced to the system of training on the job for teachers of elementary, 9-year, and high school education; training courses have been organized for their use with teachers and pupils respectively. Public universities that train teachers have also played their role. The contribution of NPOs as collaborators in this sector is considerable.

Interventions for gender mainstreaming in education enhanced the cooperative potential among structures inside the education system. Research, training programs, and curricula review were conducted by actors inside the pre-university and university education system, with support by strategic donors. For interventions in the curricula and the criteria for the approval of school textbooks, Ministry of Education, the Institute of Curricula and Training (currently the Education Development Institute), and the Board for the Approval of Pre-University Education Textbooks (BOMIT) worked with the assistance of UNDP and other donors. In public universities, mainly in programs for the training of teachers, school psychologists, sociologists, and social workers, gender research and analyses, reflections and interventions into university curricula were conducted in cooperation with internal resources and international donors. UNDP and foreign expertise supported the introduction of the "Master of Gender Studies" program at the University of Tirana, Faculty of Social Sciences. In all public universities for the training of teachers, there were investments and interventions on gender issues through the network of gender trainers and civic and democratic education centers near them. Replicable models of the engagement of professional education in gender equality issues are being created in general and vocational high school education. Research data have encouraged new curricula products in schools.

In spite of achievements, challenges remain in the low representation of women in leading administrative positions in

education; the application of special measures to encourage the enrolment of girls in vocational high school education; creation of policies to include girls with disabilities, from rural areas, special linguistic and ethnic communities mainly Roma; training of teachers and gender experts in the area of education.

Although women and girls represent the largest number of graduates from higher education, their economic status leaves much to be desired. The participation of women in the labor force has decreased steadily (INSTAT, 2010). Women's level of participation in the labor force in 2009 was 51.8%, compared to 56.2% in 2007. Women in Albania have less access than men to start a job and therefore unemployment rates among them are higher. The employment rate for the 15-64 years population for 2009 was 53.4%. This indicator was 64.3% for males and 43.6% for females. The employment rate for women has been decreasing since 2007 when it was 49.3%. The level of unemployment among women in 2009 was 15.9%, compared to 12.2% for males in the same year; in 2007, women's unemployment rate was at 12.2%. Indicators of long-term unemployment (according to the standard definition, longer unemployed persons are persons unemployed for one year or more) indicate that women have higher probability to remain unemployed for a long time compared to men. The difference is considerable, respectively 10.6% to 7.8%. This gap has widened through the years. From 2007, long-term unemployment for women and girls has increased: from 8.8% to 10.6%. Also, among the discouraged unemployed, women make up for 70%, which means that these women and girls no longer seek to enter the labor market. Oftentimes, discouragement is the result of the lack of social care services for children and the elderly. Employment by sector also indicates differences in gender indexes. In the state sector, there are 54.3% males and 45.7% females employed; in the private sector, there are 70.3% males and 29.7% females, and in the agricultural sector, there are 43.3% males and 56.7% females. Data on the unemployed in the state sector indicate that women make up the highest percentage of employment in professions such as specialists or ordinary employees, which are less paid compared to professions such as lawmakers, senior employees and officials, policymakers, which are mainly occupied by men. Comparing the rates of employment for both levels, at the central and local ones, data indicate that women take up a higher percentage of employment at the central level. Thus, in local government institutions, 43% of those employed are female, while the figure drops to 30% in the local administrations.

Challenges to education in Albania

- Creating a clear quantitative overview of the roles and levels of gender mainstreaming at various levels and areas of the education system, using separate data for both sexes;
- Gender equalities existing at all levels of education; (enrolment, graduation, structural inequalities in the teaching profession and in educational institutions);
- Assessment of specific education needs, both immediate and practical as well as long-term and strategic, for boys and girls, women and men, and the specific planning to address these needs
- Strong gender stereotypes in programs, school textbooks of all levels;
- Different career orientation for boys and girls;
- Professional training not related to existing labor market opportunities;
- Ensuring an equal division of women and men in the drafting, planning, decision making, management, administration, and income generation for men and women, boys and girls in terms of access, participation, and the distribution of education resources.

Gender mainstreaming in education is more than just equal number of women and men, girls and boys in the education system. It also entails changes in policies and changes in institutions, so that these are in support of gender equality. That is how gender mainstreaming would produce new dimensions in the education system, which, by all odds, will require changes in the philosophy of education programs, management style, and operational strategies at the local level (UNDP, 2005).

While development has been seen as an attempt to increase equality of life of all people, gender in the context of development, works toward making sure that the special needs of women vis-à-vis those of men, are fulfilled in this process.

Some important elements of gender mainstreaming in education, which could be addressed by all national goals, objectives, and priorities, should aim at:

- ◆ making clear the significance of gender with regard to factors such as race/ethnicity, geographic area, class/caste, which are of special importance in the education process;

- ◆ ensuring gender equality in access in general and in particular with regard to research that lead to better opportunities for career and employment;
- ◆ overcoming structural obstacles, which may be legal, economic, political, or cultural, and which may affect the access and/or participation of girls and boys, women and men in opportunities offered for education;
- ◆ increasing awareness about the active role that women and girls could and should play in development; and
- ◆ increase women's participation in decision making with regard to education management and leadership.

Gender mainstreaming in education has been considered a tool to achieve gender equality. The realization of this initiative in practice requires awareness and maximal engagement of all government structures, all education system actors, as well as all organizations and persons who are experts in this regard, in order to coordinate their actions and all together enable its accomplishment.

The final goal of gender mainstreaming is to ensure that women and men, boys and girls benefit equally. Gender mainstreaming requires that all decisions and interventions related to the development process be gender sensitive.

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