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Language Education as a Tool for Empowering Women

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“It took me quite a long time to develop a voice,
and now that I have it, I am not going to be silent”

Madeleine Albright

*To my mom and dad,
My strength, my guidepost for everything.*

*Alla mia mamma e al mio papà,
La mia forza, il mio punto di riferimento per tutto.*

Abstract

As education is the key to achieve women's empowerment, language education can be the matrix of the actualisation of that empowerment on a global scale.

After providing a theoretical perspective on the connection between girls' education and women's empowerment, the second chapter will shine a spotlight on the specific ways in which girls' and women's education can transform the world.

The third chapter will focus on the relationship between language learning and how gender issues can influence second/foreign language acquisition, providing evidence on how knowing more than one language can help empower women from a social and economic point of view.

The fourth chapter will present the specific case of Nepalese women and how the English language is a tool for educational and socio-economic empowerment on a global scale.

Since this thesis is not data driven, I will base my arguments on observations and the available research in this area. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to illustrate how theories of language learning relate to real-life situations and to show how second/foreign language education can be a tool for empowering women.

Keywords

Education, gender equality, language education, empower women, women's and girls' education.

List of Abbreviations

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CRC	Conference of the Right of the Child
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
ECCE	Early Child Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EDGE	English and Digital for Girls' Education
EIL	English as International Language
EFA	Education for All
EFL	English Foreign Language
ELE	English Language Education
ELL	English Language Learning
ELT	English Language Teaching
EMI	English as a medium of instruction
ESL	English as a Second Language
ETTE+	English for Teaching: Teaching for English
fMRI	functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
FL	Foreign Language
GAR	Gross Attendance Ratio
GDI	Gender-Related Development Index
GEM	Global Education Monitoring
GER	Gross Enrolment Rate
GPI	Gender Parity Index
HDI	Human Development Index
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NAR	Net Attendance Ratio
NDHS	Nepal Demographic and Health Survey
NESP	National Education System Plan
NGO	Non-Government organization

NIITE	National Initiative to Improve Teaching in English
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SLC	School Level Certificate
SSDP	School Sector Development Plan
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UN	United Nations
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNGA	United Nation General Assembly
UNGEI	United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNPD	United Nations Procurement Division
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSO	Voluntary Service Overseas

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Introduction

Education is the key to empower women. It unlocks their full potential, providing them the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives. When girls receive an education, they marry later, gain the skills needed to enter the labor market, recognize the importance of health care and seek it for themselves and their families, and mostly they become aware of their rights and gain the confidence they need to insist on them. Educated women not only help to build stronger economies, but also improve the quality of life for families and communities, and can participate in the national development process of a better society. Education is not only the key element to women's empowerment; it is a key element to global development and, without doubts, the world's best investment (Sperling and Winthrop, 2015).

As education is the key to achieve women's empowerment, language education can be the matrix of the actualisation of that empowerment on a global scale.

In this thesis, I analyzed the connection between girls' language education and women's empowerment. Denying equal opportunities in language learning to women is not only denying them the chance to be able to speak and communicate in a practical manner in a language different from their own, but it also means denying them the opportunity to grow, open their minds, and acquire the knowledge needed to be empowered and direct their own lives.

The first chapter will provide a theoretical perspective on the topic of language education as a tool for empowering women, setting the stage for the more detailed analysis that follows.

The second chapter will shine a spotlight on the specific ways in which girls' and women's education can transform the world, providing an overview of nine of the many real positive effects of girls' education and the wide-ranging returns in areas that span from economic growth to climate change, from children's and women's survival rates and health to children's rights and child marriage. Granting a quality education to women and girls is essential for both their empowerment and sustainable development. Giving them the opportunity to learn one or more languages different from their mother tongue can expand learning opportunities and provide them more possibilities for a better future.

The third chapter will focus on the relationship between language learning and how gender issues can influence second/foreign language acquisition, providing evidence on

how knowing more than one language can help empower women from a social and economic point of view. The long-standing belief that women are better at languages than men and the reason why girls outperform boys in the field of language learning has been a popular topic of research for many years now. Many linguists argued that women are better language learners because of their natural features for speaking and their inborn characteristics. Is there any truth to this theory? Is language learning a feminine domain, or it only seems that way due to the influence of stereotypical beliefs? Following a feminist poststructuralist perspective, this is a folkloristic theory that needs a more detailed and specific explanation than 'female students are keen to learn foreign languages' since sex is just one single factor that can influence an individual's performance.

Controlling and limiting access to second/foreign language education, based on gender differences, creates barriers, but granting a quality and equal language education to all can indeed improve people's lives, providing them access to better jobs or amplifying their mobility, as well as having huge positive effects on a global scale.

The chapter also introduces the concept of English as an international language (EIL), a tool for educational and socio-economic empowerment. Language can act as a barrier, precluding jobs opportunities as well as isolating and marginalizing people, but proficiency in an international language such as English can open up countless doors. EIL can give women, who are struggling to emerge or to assert their rights, the opportunity to make their voice heard, to improve their quality and access to education as well as increasing their employment opportunities and quality of life.

The final chapter will present the specific case of Nepalese women and how the English language is a tool for educational and socio-economic empowerment on a global scale. I decided to focus on women's English language education in Nepal due to the fact that, among the world's poorest countries, where despite major improvements in women's and girls' access to quality education over the last few decades, gender inequality still persists, Nepal's education system has had one of the most interesting and fast journeys towards girls' access to education and women's empowerment.

Most of the countries around the world have an education system that was established centuries ago, giving them a long time to reduce and eliminate the gender gap in education, but the development of education in Nepal started only in 1951, with the birth of Nepalese democracy (Bista, 2011). Starting from zero, Nepal has made some remarkable progress in the last 70 years to promote gender equality at all levels of

education, especially in primary/secondary education. However, Nepal is still characterized by a wide gender disparity and still has a long way ahead before ending education inequalities. From son preference and child marriage to the unfair social tradition of *chhaupadi* (isolation during menstruation), many are the reasons that affect girls' educational opportunities, limiting attendance and pushing them to drop out of school.

Like in every other aspect of life, gender differences play a huge role in decreasing women's and girls' opportunities to learn another language. To young Nepalese women, English has become a necessary skill needed to access employment and higher-level of educational opportunities, a new way to improve their future. Many are the programs that help overcome the barriers of gender equality, but the one I will discuss and analyze will be British Council's English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE) initiative. This is the perfect example of a program that aims to improve teenage girls' English level while also helping them develop essential and useful skills to improve their life prospects and increase their future possibilities. Programs like EDGE have the power to improve and create new and incredible opportunities for women and girls.

Since this thesis is not data driven, I will base my arguments on observations and the available research in this area. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to illustrate how theories of language learning relate to real-life situations and to show how second/foreign language education can be a tool for empowering women.

"Every girl, no matter where she lives,
no matter what her circumstance, has a right to learn.
Every leader, no matter who he or she is or the resources available to him or her,
has a duty to fulfil and protect this right".¹

Malala Yousafzai - 2016

Chapter 1 - Theoretical perspective

1.0 Introduction

This first chapter will provide a theoretical perspective on the connection between girls' language education and women's empowerment. After presenting a brief historical perspective of the policy documents that implemented access, quality and equality of education in general from the 1990s to this day, the chapter shine a spotlight on the specific ways in which girls' and women's education transforms the world.

As the focus of this thesis is language education as a tool for empowering women, the second part of this chapter focuses on gender equality and language education, the gatekeeping aspects of language teaching and learning, and how gender stereotyping creates generalist assumptions like language learning as a feminine domain. It also provides evidence on how knowing more than one language can help empower women from a social and economic point of view.

The last part of the chapter introduces the case study of this thesis, how language education, and the English language in particular, can help empowering Nepalese women and girls.

1.1 Education and gender equality

Education empowers women. As Sperling and Winthrop (2015) put it, "girls who are able to attend school, and thus to develop important skills such as literacy and numeracy and greater analytical skills, are better able to navigate the world around them" (Sperling &

¹ Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate and Co-Founder of the Malala Fund, in the foreword to the research report *What Works in Girls' Education*. Brookings Institution Press, Washington, DC.

Winthrop, 2015). Education unlocks women's full potential and it provides them the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives.

Recent studies on the relationship between a quality education and women's empowerment identified specific ways in which education empowers women, especially for those women who live in the world's poorest countries. One of these studies that highlighted the benefits women have regarding health care, domestic violence and freedom of movement, was the cross-country analysis made by the World Bank's researchers Hasan and Klugman (2014). This report presented findings of thousands of surveys on the connection between girls' education and women's empowerment and how receiving a quality education plays a major role in helping them overcome "the pervasive deprivations and constraints that women and girls worldwide face—from epidemic gender-based violence to laws and norms that prevent women from owning property, working, making decisions about their own lives, and having influence in society" (Hasan & Klugman et al, 2014).

“Around the world, we see that better educated women are often better able to make and implement decisions and choices, even where gender norms are restrictive. In South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa, women with more education are less likely to have to ask their husband's or family's permission to seek medical care. In all regions, women with more education also tend to marry later and have fewer children. Enhanced agency – the ability to make decisions about one's own life and act on them to achieve a desired outcome, free of violence, retribution, or fear – is a key reason that children of better educated women are less likely to have stunted growth: educated mothers have more power to act for their children's benefit at all levels, including basic nutrition and health (Hasan & Klugman et al, 2014)

Despite major improvements in women's and girls' access to quality education over the last few decades, gender inequality still persists and it's especially harsh for those women who live in the world's poorest countries. Since education is not only a key element to empower individuals but it's also essential to global development, this gender inequality represents a significant loss of opportunities. Girls' education has real positive effects and wide-ranging returns in areas that span from economic growth to climate change, from children's and women's survival rates and health to children's rights and child marriage.

Marcus and Page (2016) gave an overview of the impact of girls' education reporting that "in addition to its effects on economic development and public health, education contributes to women's empowerment through: developing skills and capabilities such as critical thinking, literacy and numeracy, and communication skills, which lay the foundations for decent livelihoods and equitable relationships in adulthood; increasing girls' self-confidence, agency, and ability to express their hopes and make decisions about their own lives; increasing women's likelihood of obtaining better-paid work; and developing gender-egalitarian attitudes among girls and boys" (Marcus & Page, 2016).

The 2013/14 EFA Global Education Monitoring (GEM) Report, *Teaching and Learning—Achieving Quality for All*, reported that "among low income countries, disparities are commonly at the expense of girls: 20% achieve gender parity in primary education, 10% in lower secondary education and 8% in upper secondary education. Among middle and high income countries, where more countries achieve parity at any level, the disparities are increasingly at the expense of boys as one moves up to the lower and upper secondary levels. For example, 2% of upper middle income countries have disparity at the expense of boys in primary school, 23% in lower secondary school and 62% in upper secondary school" (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Tackling gender inequality through education is fundamental to eradicate discrimination, promote multicultural and sustainable environments and guarantee equal opportunities for boys and girls to fully realize their potential.

1.1.1 The historical/policy perspective: 1990s – Present

The 1990s opened a new page in the history of the development of girls' education. With the ratification of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), entry into force September 2, 1990, "countries essentially committed themselves to the principle that all children have fundamental rights as individual persons and that state authorities have obligations to provide for those rights" (Howe & Covell, 2007). Education is one of those rights. "By its explicit mention of 'the child' – meaning every human being under the age of eighteen or majority, male or female – the CRC reinforced the 1960 UNESCO Convention and Recommendation against Discrimination in Education which should have covered young children in any case" (Marope & Kaga, 2015).

The concept of education as an essential right for women too was further emphasized during the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing where Hillary Rodham Clinton gave her famous speech '*Women Rights are Human Rights*', linking the notion of women's right with that of human's rights. Every child, no matter if boy or girl, has an undeniable right to education and a strong start in life.

What we are learning around the world is that if women are healthy and educated, their families will flourish. [...] As long as discrimination and inequities remain so commonplace everywhere in the world, as long as girls and women are valued less, fed less, fed last, overworked, underpaid, not schooled, subjected to violence in and outside their homes -- the potential of the human family to create a peaceful, prosperous world will not be realized (Clinton, 1995)

In April 2000, The World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal established the Education for All (EFA) framework, six goals set to improve all aspects of the quality of education before 2015. Goal 1's aim was to expand and improve early childhood care and education (ECCE), especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children; Goal 2 to ensure good quality universal primary education; Goal 3 concerned granting equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills to young people and adults; Goal 4 aimed to achieving a 50% improvement in levels of adult literacy; Goal 5 aimed at eliminating gender inequality in primary and secondary education and granting equal access (and achievement in) good quality basic education; Goal 6's focus was on improving all aspects of the quality of education (EFA GEM Report, 2005).

Another huge boost to the development of girls' education came few months later, when leaders of 189 countries gathered at the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 and set the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), eight goals that needed to be achieved by 2015. Each goal had a specific target, and two of these had direct relevance for girls' empowerment in the field of education: achieving universal primary education by enabling both boys and girl to enroll and complete a full course of primary education (MDG 2), and promoting gender equality and empower women eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education by 2005, and at all levels by 2015 (MDG 3).

Between 2000 and 2015, there has been major advancements and improvements towards some of the MDGs, but at the end of 2015 the achievements have been uneven. Some

countries achieved many of the goals, while others did not realize any. The MDGs expired in 2015 and the post-2015 agenda brought us the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This new set of goals, which are the main objects of the global development agenda spanning from 2015-2030, are now carrying on the momentum generated by the MDGs with 17 targets. The ultimate goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to develop a sustainable future and to leave no one behind. As it was for the MDGs, two of the SDGs are vital to further improve the development of girls' education: "the aim of SDG 4 is to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all, while the aim of SDG 5 is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"(UN Women, 2015).

Real progress has been made to increase access to education, particularly in primary school, for both boys and girls. However, access does not always mean equity and quality of education. As stated in the SDG 4 description by UN Women (2015), "for education to deliver, it must be inclusive and high-quality".

When a student experience success for the first time, she/he learn there is no limit to what she/he can do, and when all children have access to education it will drastically change our world. This is the real power of education.

1.1.2 Education of girls to transform the world

Education is the key to empower women; it unlocks their full potential, providing them the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives. But women's and girls' education does not only have positive outcomes for those who receive it, it transforms the entire world.

When women and girls are educated, they help build stronger economies and more environmentally sustainable societies, improve the quality of life for families and communities, and are a valid resource in the fight against hunger, diseases, and poverty. Education is not only the key element to women's empowerment, it's a key element to global development. As Sperling and Winthrop (2015) put it, women's and girls' education is, without any doubt, *the world's best investment*.

Poverty is by far the greatest barrier to girls' education. Women living in poor countries with "ethnically or spatially marginalized backgrounds often fare substantially worse than their male counterparts" (EFA GEM Report, 2016). School expenses, including registration fee, books, school uniform (mandatory from grade 5 upwards) and distance

from schools continue also to represent a barrier for poorer families. When they find themselves lacking economic resources, parents still tend to prioritize sons' education; gender inequality means that women will have access to fewer resources, fewer opportunities to work or start their own business, and they will be kept mainly in unpaid domestic work.

In middle income countries in Latin America, such as Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador and Mexico, the proportion of women in paid employment increases sharply as women's education level rises. In Mexico, while 39% of women with primary education are employed, the proportion rises to 48% of those with secondary education. Education plays a much stronger role in determining women's engagement in the labour force than it does for men (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Providing educational opportunities help girls to become self-reliant. Moreover, a high-quality education for girls reduces rates of child marriage and diminish the harmful consequences for girls who are already married. "Around 2.9 million girls (aged 20-24) were married by the age of 15 in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, equivalent to one in eight girls in each region"(EFA GEM Report, 2014). Those girls were robbed of their chance to a normal childhood. Protecting girls' right to education is one of the most effective ways to avoid child marriage. If access to quality primary education was guaranteed to all girls in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia, "child marriage would fall by 14%, from almost 2.9 million to less than 2.5 million, and if they had secondary education it would fall by 64% to just over 1 million" (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Education, especially of girls and women, is also essential in addressing environmental challenges: it is, in fact, the most effective resource for "curtailing population growth, increasing women's autonomy over fertility-related decisions and the timing of pregnancies. It also encourages sustainable lifestyles, waste reduction, improved energy use, increased public transport use, support for pro-environment policies, and environmental activism" (EFA GEM Report, 2016).

Climate change today is one of the biggest and most important issues that our world is facing, and due to their weaker social-economic position, "women are differently and sometimes more seriously affected by climate change and natural disasters than men"

(FEMM Committee, 2015). Broadening access to education, especially for girls, is one of the more effective strategies against climate change effects. This will enhance people's adaptability to climate-related risks and it will encourage them to support and engage in mitigation actions.

A research conducted by Wheeler and Hammer (2010) at the Center for Global Development presented girls' education as a strategy to reduce considerably carbon emission. The results of the study suggested that "expanding women's education faster than currently-projected trends would prevent many thousands of deaths from floods and droughts, and hundreds of millions of cases of weather-related losses related to injuries, homelessness and other forms of deprivation" (Wheeler & Hammer, 2010).

Individuals, families and societies benefit when girls and women receive a better quality education. "More educated mothers are better able to feed their children well and keep them in good health. Mothers' education also has powerful intergenerational effects, changing family preferences and social norms. Four extra years in school in Nigeria was estimated to reduce fertility rates by one birth per girl. Short-term education supporting mothers of young children can have a significant impact on health and nutrition. Targeted non-formal education may be effective in helping women plan childbirth" (EFA GEM Report, 2014), and it can also reduce infant and maternal mortality.

Gakidou (2010) conducted a study on the effects of education on child mortality in 175 countries and results proved that increasing women's education did reduce, between 1970 and 2009, child mortality of children under the age of five by more than half the total. "Of the 8.2 million more children who survived past age five, increases in women's educational attainment led to 4.2 million of them. This accounts for half the decrease in child mortality over forty years, meaning schooling of women of reproductive age makes a very large contribution to the health of their children" (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015).

Girls' education also reduces rates of HIV/AIDS. Data from a 2011 study in Zimbabwe (one of the countries with worst rates of HIV/AIDS) demonstrated that education was one of the main reason that contributed to the remarkably fast decline in infection rates of HIV. (Halperin et al., 2011). "By 2010, 75% of women aged 15 to 24 in Zimbabwe had completed lower secondary school, and the HIV prevalence rate had fallen from its peak of 29% in 1997 to under 14%, declining four times faster than in neighboring Malawi and Zambia where education levels are lower" (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Sperling and Winthrop (2015) called girls' education "the *social vaccine* against HIV/AIDS because of the significant reduction in the incidence of that disease among

better-educated girls and women” (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). This also holds for malaria, one of the world’s deadliest but most preventable diseases. “Improved access to quality education for women cannot replace the need for investment in drugs and in bed nets treated with insecticide – one of the most cost-effective ways to prevent malaria – but it has a crucial role to play in complementing and promoting these measures” (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

A study by Ndjinga and Minakawa (2010) showed that, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (one of the countries with the highest rate of malaria-related deaths), more and better education women and men are more likely to use bed nets of about 75%.

Gakidou (2013) conducted a research in Cameroon that resulted with undeniable proof that if all women who had completed a secondary level education, the percentage of malaria would fall from 28% to 19%.

Girls’ education also has a part to play in “transforming key economic sectors, such as agriculture, upon which both rich and poor countries and households rely. Primary and secondary education give future farmers foundation skills as well as critical knowledge about sustainability challenges in agriculture” (EFA GEM Report, 2016). Acquiring basic skills such as reading, writing and do mathematics allows farmers to use new agricultural methods, deal with possible risks, and react to market signals.

Evidence of the importance of granting a fair and qualitative good education to young girls can be also seen in the very active role that women play in local and national development. “Education is a key element in political participation, inclusion, advocacy and democracy. It increases knowledge about key political leaders and the workings of political systems”, and can give women the tools they need to succeed and take on more leadership roles (EFA GEM Report, 2016).

Education not only boosts women’s possibilities to be employed, “but to hold jobs that are more secure and provide good working conditions and decent pay. Education is particularly vital for women so that they can benefit from decent jobs, becoming able to make decisions about spending resources and hence gaining more control over their own lives” (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Another great obstacle to women’s and girls’ education is armed conflict. “Refugee children and adolescents, especially if they are girls, are five times likelier to be out of school than their non-refugee peers” (EFA GEM Report, 2016). Education can also reduce support to militancy and terrorism. Less educated people have, in fact, more chances to become terrorists and/or to support terrorist groups: “as women become more

educated, they are less likely to support militancy and terrorism than similarly educated men” (CAI, 2018).

In a study about the connection between women and extremism (Ladbury, 2015) it was found that raising the awareness of women and girls has a huge impact on helping to prevent radicalization and support to militancy groups. Educating women and girls can help societies to recognise, prevent and stop the support for terrorism, giving women the skills and knowledge they need to actively dissuade young people from associating with a militant group. Girls’ education is hence an instrument for peace.

1.2 Gender equality and the power of language education

Being fluent in two or more languages can create a whole new world of possibilities and career opportunities. Hussain, Ahmend and Zafar (2009) explained that today foreign language education can no longer be seen simply as “an academic activity but as a potential way of enabling the disenfranchised to gain access to social and economic power” (Hussain, Ahmend and Zafar, 2009). Bilingual and/or multilingual education can represent an incredible resource for promote both social and gender equality, develop new ways of thinking, “encourage understanding between different population groups and ensure respect for fundamental rights” (UNESCO, 2003).

Learning another language offers a means of gaining a deeper understanding of other cultures. It opens up access to other value systems and ways of interpreting the world, encouraging inter-cultural understanding and helping reduce xenophobia (UNESCO, 2003).

Languages have a very important social dimension, and learning a foreign language is not only a great way to improve someone’s economic life, but numerous studies have demonstrated that one of the benefits of knowing more than one language is that it improves brain functions, i.e. it can reduce certain biases and to be more rational in their decision-making process (Keysar et al., 2012), and it can also make brains more resilient to Alzheimer’s dementia (Perani et al., 2017).

As education is the key to achieve women’s empowerment, language education can be the matrix of the actualisation of that empowerment on a global scale.

Men and women both benefit from women who speak more than one language: not only they can have more employment opportunities, resulting economically independent and raising family incomes, they can also promote intercultural dialogue and understanding between communities and nations.

Granting a quality education to women and girls is essential for both their personal empowerment and a sustainable development: it can help building stronger economies, improving the quality of life for families and communities, and creating a better and more sustainable society. But what really can change women’s and girls’ life and have huge positive effects on a global scale is giving them the tools to participate not only to a local

or national environment but to a universal world-wide one, and language education is one of the tools can help achieve this goal.

One of the greatest female multilingual role model in history was Cleopatra, the last Pharaoh of the Ptolemaic Kingdom. Unfortunately, history remembers her for her beauty and personal romantic relationships, but, in truth, she was a woman of keen intellect and extraordinary professional merits. She was a member of the Ptolemaic dynasty, a Greek family of Macedonian origin that ruled over Egypt after the death of Alexander the Great, but her family refused to learn Egyptian and spoke only Greek, which is why Greek and Egyptian were both used as official court languages (the Rosetta Stone is one clear example of this dualism). Cleopatra was the first ruler to learn Egyptian. As Plutarch reported in his *Life of Antony*, she rarely needed an interpreter because she could speak nine languages: Greek, Egyptian, Latin, Syrian, Arabic, Persian, Aramaic, Hebrew and Troglodyte, an Ethiopian tongue. This, of course, was something she used to her own benefit, “conversing with neighboring dignitaries in their own tongue and being active in political discussions. It also earned her the respect and affection of the Egyptian people living outside of the Greek influence of Alexandria” (Blackaby, 2009).

Today we have other examples of polyglot women. Madeleine Albright, former and first female US Secretary of State, is fluent in English, French, Czech, and Russian, while she could also understand both Polish and Serbo-Croatian. Several of her male predecessors didn't speak any foreign language. Christiane Amanpour, journalist and Chief International Correspondent of CNN, can speak English, Farsi (Persian) and French, while Angela Merkel has benefit enormously from her ability to speak fluently German, English and Russian in her years as German Chancellor.

As great and powerful these women are as role models, we don't have enough of these positive female multilingual examples for young girls. “Social situations and political institutions are responsible for imposing identities to groups of women with the aim of maintaining their subordinate status in the society” (Rind, 2015).

A study made by Rind (2015) on gender identities and the effects on girls' foreign language learning experience examined how Pakistani female students' roles as learners were influenced by their socially constructed gender identities and gender roles. “Gender roles are applied coercively to women in Pakistan society” says Rind. The population of Pakistan is around 180 million and, according to the 2015 Federal Education Ministry of Pakistan, only 26% of women are literate. Analyzing the experience of 25 girls, aged 19 to 22, studying in a public sector university, the study suggest that girls' gender identities

can act to “limit their actions and interactions with textbooks, peers and teachers regarding English as a Second Language (ESL). However, some female students seemed to challenge their socially structured identities. Against certain social norms, they were found to exercise their choice and agency, though such autonomy is limited and conditioned” (Rind, 2015).

Students should not be treated differently based on their gender or on unfair preconceptions of society. Gender identities and the different roles associated with men and women are not a disadvantage, but they help to build a more different and sustainable society.

1.2.1 Language Learning and the Feminist Poststructural Framework

Based on a combination between feminism and poststructuralism², and developed from the ideas on power, knowledge and discourses of Derrida (1987) and Foucault (1972), Weedon (1987) proposed a new “way of conceptualizing the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness that focuses on how power is exercised and on the possibilities of change [...] making the primary assumption that it is language which enables us to think, speak and give meaning to the world around us” (Weedon, 1987).

Expanding Weedon’s feminist poststructural framework, Norton & Pavlenko (2004) discussed and widened the view of gender, saying that this concept cannot be considered as a simple male/female dichotomy or an individual property, but it has to be considered as “a complex system of social relations and discursive practices differentially constructed in local contexts” (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004).

The poststructuralist view [...] emphasizes the fact that beliefs and ideas about gender relations and normative masculinities, femininities, or representations of third or fourth gender, vary across cultures – as well as over time within a culture – based on social, political, and economic changes. Consequently, we do not assume that all women – or all men – have a lot in common with each other just

² Post-structuralism refers to the intellectual movements developed in the twentieth-century by French philosophers and theorists. Main contributors such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Julia Kristeva were former structuralists who, after abandoning structuralism, became quite critical of it. In direct contrast to structuralism's claims of culturally independent meaning, post-structuralists typically view culture as inseparable from meaning (New World Encyclopedia, 2018).

because of their biological makeup or elusive 'social roles', nor do we assume that gender is always relevant to understanding of language learning outcomes. Instead, gender emerges as one of many important facets of social identity which interacts with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, and social status (Pavlenko, 2001).

A study made by Rind (2015) on gender identities and the effects on girls' foreign language learning experience examined how Pakistani female students' roles as learners were influenced by their socially constructed gender identities and gender roles. "Gender roles are applied coercively to women in Pakistan society" says Rind. The population of Pakistan is around 180 million and, according to the 2015 Federal Education Ministry of Pakistan, only 26% of women are literate. Analyzing the experience of 25 girls, aged 19 to 22, studying in a public sector university, the study suggest that girls' gender identities can act to "limit their actions and interactions with textbooks, peers and teachers regarding English as a Second Language (ESL). However, some female students seemed to challenge their socially structured identities. Against certain social norms, they were found to exercise their choice and agency, though such autonomy is limited and conditioned" (Rind, 2015).

Students should not be treated differently based on their gender or on unfair preconceptions of society. Gender identities and the different roles associated with men and women are not a disadvantage, but they help to build a more different and sustainable society. Gender stereotypes are the results of the male/female dichotomy that highlights every difference between males and females in order to separate them into two defined and opposite groups. However, following the poststructuralist view, this classification depending on what is commonly considered to be typically feminine or masculine is too general and can lead to misconceptions.

Over time, gender stereotypes made language learning appear like a predominant feminine domain. However, this is only a common belief. For example, to explain the gap in performance in language education between women and men, Ellis (1994) assumed that female superiority in L2 learning was "characterized by cooperative behavior and sensitivity in dealing with relationships" (Schmenk, 2004). However, he failed to explain how gender can influence language learning performance without falling into stereotypical and generalist assumptions.

Common stereotypes influence environments both inside and outside the language classroom. Understanding the process of creating stereotype patterns for the sexes is vital to reduce these generalist beliefs and resist stereotyping.

1.2.2 Language education as a gatekeeper

When talking about gatekeeping, we usually refer to the act of controlling and/or limiting access to something. In many ways, language is a gatekeeper. It has both the power to bring people together and to keep them apart, driving a wedge in between them and acting as a barrier.

Language acts as a gate to keep out or a bridge that one crosses for access to powerful positions encouraged by language and rules. Not possessing the language, whether written or oral, remains a major device to maintain boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Moore, 2007).

Pavlenko (2001) discussed gatekeeping practices related to issues of bilingualism and gender. In her study, she presented and analyzed some situations in which the knowledge of the main language is favored by everyone in the community and others in which gender relations in majority and minority communities left women behind, exploiting linguistic practices as means of oppression and gatekeeping.

Gatekeeping in language education can prevent women from being fluent in two or more languages, but it can also involve damaging women through language maintenance and transmission. Pavlenko (2001) explained that language maintenance, as a resistance strategy to the majority language and culture, can be used as an oppressive practice. The role of ‘guardians of the home language’ unofficially associated with women as keepers of language traditions can bound them to only minority communities, preventing women from learning or using another language, as well as limiting their access to working opportunities and restricting their financial independence.

Limited or non-existent proficiency in a particular foreign language can be crippling for someone’s business and it can aggravate women’s vulnerabilities even further. On the contrary, the knowledge of a foreign language can be an incredible advantage.

Controlling and limiting access to second/foreign language education, based on race-ethnicity, class, culture and gender differences, creates barriers, inequality in power and

contributes to arrest development for families and societies. However, granting a quality and equal language education to all can indeed improve people's lives, providing them access to better jobs or amplifying their mobility, as well as having huge positive effects on a global scale.

1.2.3 English as language of empowerment

The role of the English language as a global language in today's society is undeniable. With a total of 1.5 billion speakers out of the 7.5 billion of the world population, it is the most used language in the world (Ethnologue, 2017), a *lingua franca of the modern world* (Graddol, 1997). It's the language of economics and business, education and media, and has a huge role in international communication and relationships. It has the power to expand learning opportunities and provide more possibilities for a better future, both locally and internationally. By empowering people through learning English, "some of the social inequalities in the job market may be balanced" (Hussain, Ahmed & Zafar, 2009) and it could open up new opportunities for language learners beyond the confines of their immediate environment (Mohammadian, 2014).

When it comes to learning English, women often face worse obstacles compared to men from the same country or socio-economic group. Reflecting on the concept of empowerment through language education, Esch (2009) claimed that English Language Education can lead to empowerment when it's considered as a means to expand someone's possibilities; however, this is all related to who has access to language education.

The 2016 Women's Consultation Report by the Wonder Foundation provided tangible examples on how English education can empower migrants women in their daily life. Due to gender roles and the lack of gender equality, refugee women often face worst obstacles than the men from the same countries or socioeconomic groups, and when their language education is called into question, this also involves more struggle and barriers on their part. Gender differences play a huge role in this, decreasing girls' opportunities from the enrollment stage. English Language Education can empower women providing them the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives and making purposive choices on both economic and social scale.

When women struggle to meet their basic needs and those of their dependents, English learning is pushed down their list of priorities, even though they clearly recognise that learning or improving their English would make their lives easier and better [...] Learning English is an essential part of vulnerable female migrants' journeys to feel empowered and able to make fulfilling choices, raise their aspirations and those of their friends and families, and to integrate in the society (Wonder Foundation Report, 2016)

Language can act as a barrier, precluding jobs opportunities as well as isolating and marginalizing people, but proficiency in an international language such as English can open up countless doors. EIL can give women, who are struggling to emerge or to assert their rights, the opportunity to make their voice heard, to improve their quality and access to education as well as increasing their employment opportunities and quality of life.

1.3 Nepal: a case study country

Nepal is a multicultural, multicast and multilingual country located between China and India. The agricultural sector employs 76% of Nepal's workforce, but the country's overall economic growth continues to be negatively affected by the political instability. After the popular revolution against the Rana autocratic regime (1847-1950), parliamentary democracy was introduced in 1951, but was suspended twice by Nepalese monarchs in 1960 and 2005. The recent Nepalese Civil War (1996-2006) overthrew the Nepalese monarchy and resulted in the proclamation of a republic in 2008, ending the reign of the world's last Hindu monarchy. With the adoption of 'The Constitution of Nepal 2015', the country was transformed into a federal parliamentary republic divided into seven provinces.

1.3.1 Gender Gap in the Nepalese Education System

The education system in Nepal is one of the youngest in the world. The first formal school was established in 1853 but it was intended for the education of the children of elite and advantaged groups. With the birth of Nepalese democracy in 1951, schools were formally opened to the public, but only after the introduction of a complete Education Plan in 1971 the education system began rapidly its development (Parajuli & Das, 2013). In 2015, according to the CIA World Factbook, Nepal's adult literacy rate was estimated 53.1% for women and 76.4% for men (EFA National Review Report, 2015). Despite all the progresses made towards an equitable access to education, the gender gap is still noteworthy. Nepal still has a long way ahead before ending education inequalities.

Gender discrimination is a major problem in Nepal, a problem that affects educational opportunities for girls, creating and feeding social and cultural norms that are discriminating against girls and women, keeping them out of schools. From son preference and child marriage, to the unfair social tradition of *chhaupadi*, a practice in which girls face restrictions during menstruation, many are the reasons that affects girls' educational opportunities, limiting attendance and pushing them to drop out of school.

1.3.2 The power of English language education and its effects on girls' and women's empowerment

As the English language is considered a global language, a tool for empowerment on a much larger scale, its knowledge has become a key factor for educational, socio-economic, occupational and professional gains. Bista (2011) noted that English is the only “language of communication used to promote Nepal's increasing diplomatic relations with the outside world”. Therefore, to young Nepalese women, English has become a necessary tool to direct their own lives, a skill needed to access better employment and higher-level of educational opportunities.

English is taught as a FL in Nepalese schools, from Grade 1 to Grade 12, and is increasingly being used as a medium of instruction (Bista, 2011). Private schools use English as a medium of instruction (EMI), and generally, colleges and universities deliver education in English.

Language of instruction can play an important role in the delivery of quality of education. The fact that so many English-medium private schools are mushrooming in the region is likely a response to the strong perception of the economic advantages of knowing English (Earling, 2014).

A larger number of public schools also adopted EMI, but the reality is that few of them deliver higher-quality education (Giri, 2010). The lack of quality English Language Teaching (ELT) techniques and resources in public schools (e.g. textbooks and trained teachers), as well as the outperformance of students from private schools in the School Level Certificate (SLC) examinations (national standardized exams), lead EMI to contribute to further broadened differences between higher and lower socio-economic groups. In this context, gender differences play a huge role in decreasing even more women's and girls' opportunities to learn (Giri, 2014).

In the last couple of decades, both the Nepalese government and many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) invested in partnerships to provide an equitable and qualitative education, trying to provide girls with the best means to achieve literacy and empowerment. From focusing on women's and girls' literacy and empowerment to tackling economic, cultural, and political issues that represent barriers to gender equality,

many are the programs that help overcome the barriers of gender equality (Gautam, 2016).

There are several projects and international aid services that are active in Nepal for the empowerment of women, including Room to Read's girls' education and empowerment program, Plan Nepal's education and health programs, CARE Nepal's women's and girls' economic and socio-political empowerment programs, and UNICEF's girls education and development programs (Gautam, 2016). However, there is limited awareness of the fact that language education can be a tool for empowerment. This is also due to the fact that Nepal is a multilingual country and a high percentage of the population doesn't speak the official language of Nepal. There are 123 languages spoken as mother tongue (MT), and Nepali is spoken by only 44.6% of the total population. The Nepali language is a tool for accessing better jobs, better future prospects and even better education. Without the proper language education, most of the people who don't speak the official language of business and politics, and that often come from rural areas, are destined to live only their rural lives and to be limited to their community because they only speak the language of that area. However, the focus of the case study will be not on language education in general but on English language education against a backdrop of many other languages. Less than 2% of the population of Nepal speaks English as L1; it is used as a means of education in many private schools and university, but for the majority of Nepal, English is considered a FL (Bista, 2011).

As education is the key to empower women, language education can be the matrix of the actualisation of that empowerment on a global scale. Nonetheless, I've only come across one project that focuses on education of foreign languages as a way to expand learning opportunities and provide more possibilities for a better future for women and girls. ***English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE)***, a program initiated by the British Council to improve teenage girls' English level and digital skills, contribute to increase girls' opportunities to learn the language, as well as develop important and useful skills to improve their life prospects (The British Council, 2016).

The focus of the program on both the English language and ITC is due to the fact that not only there is a language education gap between boys and girls, but there is also a digital gender gap. Helping girls to develop language and digital skills will enable them to make more informed and independent life decisions and to give a significant contribution to their families, "which is likely, as their contributions become more visible and acknowledge by communities over time, to help enhance girls' status and support the

development of more equitable society” (British Council, 2016). Programs like EDGE have the power to improve and create new and incredible opportunities for women and girls all across Nepal.

* * *

This chapter has set the stage for the more detailed analysis that follow. Enhancing women’s and girls’ chance to a better quality education is vital for both individual and global development. It has real positive effects and wide-ranging returns in areas that span from economic growth to climate change, from children's and women's survival rates and health to children's rights and child marriage.

Yet today many women—especially those who live in the world’s poorest countries—are still denied equal opportunities. In this scenario, lack of English skills can represent a significant barrier for women, denying access to better jobs, and holding them back from participating and taking a leadership role in the development of a better society. Promoting gender equality and the education of women and girls is also one of the most effective ways in the fight against hunger, diseases, and poverty.

Women’s and girls’ education does not only have positive outcomes for those who receive it; it transforms the entire world. The main reasons for which education is the key to women’s empowerment and the effects it can have on a global scale is the focus of the next chapter.

“Education is peace-building by another name. Education is the most effective form of defense spending there is. It is an investment which yields a higher profit than any other”³

Kofi Annan - 1999

Chapter 2 - Girls' Education: The World's Best Investment

2.0 Introduction

Today, 130 million girls are not in school. “If this were the population of a country, it would be the 10th largest nation in the world – the size of the United Kingdom and France put together” (Poverty is Sexist, 2017). This is unacceptable. Education is the key to empower women. It unlocks their full potential, providing them the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives.

Positive results of girls and women's education span across a wide range of areas.

When girls receive an education, they marry later, gain the skills needed to enter the labor market, recognize the importance of health care and seek it for themselves and their families, and mostly they become aware of their rights and gain the confidence they need to insist on them. “Education broadens women's employment opportunities. Literacy skills help women gain access to information about social and legal rights and welfare services. Education can increase women's political engagement by imparting skills that enable them to participate in democratic processes” (GEM Report, 2016).

Promoting gender equality and the education of women and girls is also one of the most effective ways in the fight against hunger, diseases, and poverty. Educated women not only help to build stronger economies, but also improve the quality of life for families and communities, and can participate in the national development process of a better society.

In recent years, many governments have recognized the power of education by making substantial new investments in the sector, including the poorest countries. For example, “many Sub-Saharan African countries allocated some of the billions of dollars freed up by debt cancellation towards education. Along with development assistance for

³ Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary-General and Nobel Prize Laureate, in *Learning Never Ends Colloquium*, New York, 1999 - <http://www.un.org/press/en/1999/19990910.sgs7125.doc.html>

education, debt savings helped send an additional 60 million children in sub-Saharan Africa to primary school for the first time between 2000 and 2013” (ONE, 2017).

In 2003, while promoting girls’ school enrolment, the government of Punjab, Pakistan launched the Female School Stipend Program: “this program provided a cash transfer (\$10 per quarter) to families whose daughters regularly attended middle school (at least 80% of the time). The stipend was large enough to cover the costs of both schooling and transport, addressing major barriers to girls’ school attendance” (Poverty is Sexist, 2017). Four years after the launch of the program, girls’ enrolling rate increased from 11% to 32%. “Girls whose families received the transfer were also more likely to stay in school and not be subjected to child marriage and early pregnancy. By 2014, the Female School Stipend Program reached 393,000 girls in grades 6 to 10 across 15 target districts” (Glassman & Temin, 2016).

Education is not only critical to women’s empowerment; it’s a key element to global development. It is, without any doubt, the world’s best investment (Sperling and Winthrop, 2015).

What has made girls’ education one of the most important policy agendas of so many countries was the real positive effects and wide-ranging returns in areas that span from economic growth to climate change, from children's and women's survival rates and health to children's rights and child marriage. Evidence of the importance of granting a fair and qualitative education to young girls can also be seen in the very active role that women play in local and national development once they are granted that education.

But what are the economic, social, and political effects of girls’ education? Following there are nine of the main reasons that explain why education is the key to women’s empowerment and the effects it can have on a global scale.

1. It reduces the rate of child marriage
2. It increases economic growth
3. It reduces extreme poverty
4. It increases women’s political leadership
5. It leads to Better Wages and Jobs for Women
6. It saves the lives of mothers and children
7. It reduces the rate of HIV/AIDS and malaria
8. It reduces support for militancy
9. It reduces harm to families from climate change and natural disasters.

2.1 Reduces Child Marriage

Child marriage is a violation of human rights (UNICEF, 2018), a global issue with millions of girls married every year around the world. High-quality education for girls reduces rates of child marriage and diminish the harmful consequences for girls who are already married.

For a girl, marriage not only is a treat to her life, future and health, but it can also mean the end of her schooling.

Girls who miss out or drop out of school are especially vulnerable to it. While the more exposure a girl has to formal education and the better-off her family is, the more likely marriage is to be postponed (Osotimehin, 2012).

If girls are better educated, they will have more opportunities to choose a career and better chances of a healthier and more prosperous life for themselves and their families.

Back in 2014, Jones et al. investigated and issued a report on the interplay of early marriage and education and its effects on adolescent girls' lives in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. Data from the Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey (DHS, 2011) revealed that the average age for marriage of girls was 16.5 years; in response to that, the Ethiopian Government enhanced the spreading of the knowledge of the legal penalty for marrying children under the age of 18 and increased investments on education infrastructures (including making secondary schools more accessible to children from smaller towns). However, despite this positive progress overall, there are still many barriers to girls' education in the poorer areas of the region, and child marriage is one of them.

The decision to marry should be a freely made, informed decision that is taken without fear, coercion, or undue pressure. It is an adult decision and a decision that should be made, when ready, as an adult (Osotinehim, 2012).

After they are married off, young girls have very limited prospects for independent life choices. Many of these young brides interviewed by Jones et al. (2014) said that they

were not allowed to continue their studies without the support of their husbands, which they rarely received.

School expenses, including registration fee, books, school uniform (mandatory from grade 5 upwards), and distance from schools also continue to represent a barrier for poorer families. The latter of these causes represents an issue both from an economic perspective (parents can't afford to pay for an accommodation near the school if the school is too far away to travel every day), and because parents are concerned for their girls' safety and virtue. "The general perception is that if girls have to walk long distances to school each day or live outside the parental home, they may be exposed to rape or may engage in premarital sex. These strong traditional beliefs are restraining girls' educational capacities. Early marriage provides a precautionary defense against this risk to a family's honor" (Jones et al., 2014).

Even if it's not a big of an issue as it was before, strong son-preference is also still a problem when it comes to investing in children's education. However, when families find themselves lacking economic resources, parents tend to prioritize sons' education, as explained by an 18-year-old girl interviewed for the report who had dropped out of school:

They forced me to stop my education and made me marry. The reason why they gave [my brother] money for was that they were afraid that he might migrate... It is because I am female that I have been forced to drop out from school (qt. in Jones et al., 2014).

Girls with supportive families behind them can avoid early marriage arrangements and complete their school education, with a few even having the chance to attend university. Providing educational opportunities help girls to become self-reliant. Investing in later marriage for girls and their education is a crucial driver for social change.

2.2 Increases Economic growth

Both boys' and girls' education is today fairly recognized as a major driver for change towards economic growth. Girls' education, in particular, can largely improve agricultural productivity (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). Educated and empowered women

have better chances of escape extreme poverty, lead healthier and more productive lives, and contribute to improving their families' and communities' lives.

When women are empowered to make an income, accumulate assets and increase their economic security, they improve industrial capacity and spur economic growth by creating new jobs, as well as expanding the pool of human resources and talents available in a country (All Africa, 2017).

Davis' study (2012) on agricultural productivity in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda found that “educational opportunities through farmer field schools increased the value of crops and livestock, as well as resulting in a 61 percent increase in income. The education program was particularly effective for women and illiterate farmers across the three countries, which shows that targeted education programs toward female farmers can have a large impact on agricultural productivity” (Davis, 2012).

Both individuals and countries benefit from women's education. Schooling, particularly women's schooling, is a profitable investment that has huge economic and social benefits. “When girls are educated, they have better employment opportunities and their earning potential rises. An additional year of schooling for girls is estimated to result in almost a 12% increase in wages” (Montenegro & Patrinos, 2014 qt. in *Poverty is Sexist*, 2017).

Patrinos (2008) said that “the profitability of education, according to estimates of private rate of return, is indisputable, universal, and global” (Patrinos, 2008).

As gender equality is supported by both moral and economic arguments, closing the gender gap has to become an essential strategy for all countries to create and develop a more sustainable and inclusive economy and society.

Gender, educational and economic policies are the focal points of a report issued back in 2014 by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The document presents global evidence from OECD countries and the research made by Adema et al. (2014) provided evidence for the fact that “enhancing women's economic empowerment by improving entrepreneurship and leadership could contribute to economic growth, job creation and prosperity” (OECD, 2014).

In 2010, the OECD launched its Gender Initiative to identify and examine existing “barriers to gender equality in Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship – three key dimensions of economic and social opportunities – with the aim to strengthen the

evidence base, improve policies and promote gender equality in the economies of OECD and beyond” (OECD, 2014).

Most OECD countries have achieved gender equality in the field of education, but women still remain very under-represented in growth-enhancing fields of education such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM).

Women’s position in business leadership and entrepreneurship needs to be strengthened (OECD, 2014). More gender diversity will help promote innovation and competitiveness in business, and higher education participation will provide better economic opportunities for women by raising the overall level of human capital and labour productivity.

Therefore, women are a vital resource for many economies. “In developing countries, the economic empowerment of women and girls is a prerequisite for sustainable development, pro-poor growth” (Adema, 2014) and the achievement of all the SDGs. Gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality have the highest returns on all development investments.

2.3 Reduces Extreme Poverty

Education is one of the most powerful weapons in the fight against extreme poverty (Poverty is Sexist, 2017). Nowhere on earth, women have the same opportunities as men, but for those women who live in the world’s poorest countries, it’s even worst. Gender inequality in those areas means that women will have access to fewer resources, fewer opportunities to work or build their own business, and they will mainly be confined to unpaid domestic work.

Education represents the solution to this discrimination, but many barriers keep girls out of school; fees, books, and transportation among them. If parents have to choose between sending a son or a daughter to school, in many contexts, especially in those where people live below the international poverty line (on less than \$1.90 a day), preference is usually given to the son.

Due to lack of sanitary conditions, technology, or transportation, women and girls also spend twice as much time in domestic work as men, e.g., caring for children or young siblings, obtaining safe drinking water, or cooking meals. Precious time is taken away from them, time they could use to go to school and further their education. “In some of

the poorest developing countries, nine out of ten women have not completed a primary education” (USAID, 2015).

Moreover, women also have less access to financial support:

In developing economies, women are 20 percent less likely to have a formal bank account than men and are substantially less likely to use savings and lending instruments [...] Female entrepreneurs are less likely than their male counterparts to obtain financing from formal institutions and more likely to pay high-interest rates. Cultural, regulatory, and legal barriers constitute the root of these discrepancies (USAID, 2015).

This only contributes to further the cycle of poverty. However, educating women contributes to reducing extreme poverty “by increasing chances of finding decent work and adequate earnings, and helps close wage gaps due to gender, socio-economic status and other bases of discrimination” (EFA GEM Report, 2016).

Ñopo et al. (2011) conducted a research on gender inequalities in incomes over sixty-four countries around the world and results demonstrated that, comparing males and females with the same characteristics; the wage gap depends are more pronounced among those with low education (Ñopo et al., 2011). The better and higher the level of education, the lower the wage gap, “even in countries where discrimination in the labour force means gender differences remain entrenched [...] Education makes a particular difference in the Arab States, where women with secondary education earn 87% of the wages of men, compared with 60% for those with primary education” (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Girls’ education also has a part to play in increasing earnings in key economic sectors for both rich and developing countries, such as agriculture. A quality education provides farmers literacy and numeracy skills as well as better knowledge of farming technologies, fertilizers and crop rotation to increase productivity (EFA GEM Report, 2016).

“Many countries with high rates of extreme poverty rely heavily on agriculture as the basis of their economies. Across sub-Saharan Africa, in particular, growth in agriculture has been associated with reductions in extreme poverty. This suggests that agriculture is key to reducing poverty for women, who make up a large fraction of agricultural holders” (USAID, 2015).

Learning basic skills such as reading, writing and do mathematics allows farmers to “adapt to new agricultural methods, cope with risks, and respond to market signals. A basic education helps farmers gain title to their land and apply for credit at banks” (ONE Campaign, 2017).

Educating women and girls will improve the quality of their life, produce long-term benefits for future generations, and help to put an end to extreme poverty.

2.4 Increases Women’s political leadership

Women are underrepresented both as voters and as political leaders despite their right to participate equally in democratic governance and their proven abilities as agents of change. Education can change that.

“Better-educated women are more likely to participate in volunteer and elected decision-making bodies across all levels. In those roles, they are much more likely to advocate for decisions and policy that benefit family and community life, such as improved social services” (Yousafzai, 2015).

As they cover prominent leadership roles in society (Heads of State or Government, CEOs of corporations, at the helm of civil society organizations, etc.), women not only can become an important role model for young girls, they can also change both how decisions are made and how the world perceives women’s roles in public life. Education can give women the tools they need to succeed and take on more leadership roles.

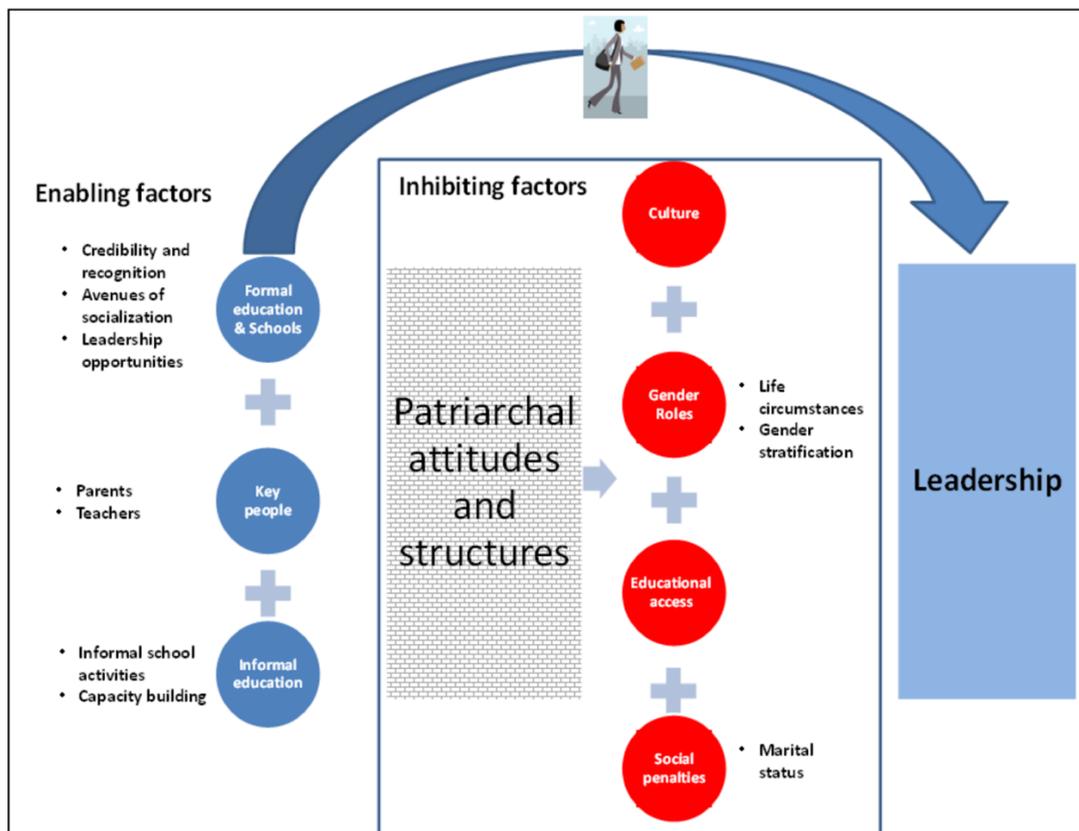
A recent study by Maloiy, Jonck, and Goujon (2016) analyzed the role of education in relation to female political leadership in the context of a largely patriarchal culture in Kenya. “Female leadership traits, which underscore consensus building, information sharing, are the types of leadership traits that are needed in many African nations to counter predominant patriarchal leadership cultures” (Maloiy, Jonck & Goujon, 2016). In the collective imagination, women are often unfairly bounded to domestic roles, while men are perceived as part of the economic and political systems. “It is pivotal for women to engage in leadership and public decision-making in order to address gender inequality as well as instill good governance principles” (IIASA, 2016). Education enables women

and girls to be more independent, strong-minded, and to have better access to leadership opportunities, e.g., they can become class prefects or head-girls while they are in schools.

In the case of Kenya, the gender disparity in education is apparent as 61% of women had limited or no access to education in 2009. However, access to education has improved and most children enter primary school with no significant gender distinction. Nevertheless, there is a clear bottleneck effect at the level of upper secondary schooling as 25% of Kenyan women aged 25 to 29 have completed at least an upper secondary education compared to 36% for their male counterparts (IIASA, 2016).

Lack of access to education represents a massive barrier for women and girls, precluding them many opportunities to achieve their full potential. “Female leaders largely develop their leadership skills as young women particularly through challenging experiences. It was confirmed that adolescence is a critical time when leadership competencies are developed. For schools and communities, this suggests a need to provide girls with opportunities to enhance and foster their leadership capabilities” (IIASA, 2016).

Figure 1. **Conceptual framework for female political leadership**



Source: Maloiy et al. (2016) *The Role of Education Pertaining to Female Political Leadership in Kenya*

Afridi et al. (2013) conducted a study on the impact of female political leadership in India, finding that female leaders generate gains in the governance of projects implemented under the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act improved as initial, gendered biases are overcome.

Improving male literacy also has a positive impact on women's political participation, perhaps because literate men are more likely to vote for women candidates and, as party leaders, to field women candidates. Raising women's participation in politics is vital not only to achieve gender equality but also because evidence shows that women politicians tend to be both less corrupt and more proactive in representing the interests of children's well-being (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Therefore, improving access and quality of education of women and girls leads to enhancing women's political participation and leadership. Democratic governance, in turn, is further improved.

Education for all girls is critical to their leadership potential. The evidence shows that women leaders are educated women, and particularly so beyond the community level. Women need the education to access power, but they also need further education and professional training to be credible and have influence once they are in leadership positions, within civic associations, business, and formal political positions (O'Neil, Plank & Domingo, 2015).

2.5 Better Wages and Jobs for Women

Education gives people strong skills for entering the labour market and increasing their possibilities of getting better, higher-paying jobs. This is particularly true for women and girls. Education boosts their chances to be employed and to hold more secure jobs with good working environments and fair wages. Kabeer (2012) proved that “there is a close association between the quality of jobs and gender – with men dominating the upper echelons of the hierarchy and women over-represented in the lower echelons - along with

other markers of social inequality - caste, ethnicity, race, legal status and so on” (Kabeer, 2012). Thanks to a quality, high-level education, they can benefit from decent jobs, becoming aware and able to make decisions about spending resources and, therefore, they can gain more control over their own lives.

As countries develop, education becomes a passport for women to enter the labour force. When society becomes more accepting of women’s formal employment, women with more education are in a stronger position to get paid work (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Studies made for this report showed that in some Latin America countries (Argentina, Brazil, El Salvador and Mexico), the increase of women in the labour force is directly related to the improvement of women’s education. “In Mexico, for example, while 39% of women with primary education are employed, the proportion rises to 48% of those with secondary education” (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Women’s and girl’s education also increases their chances of obtaining full-time jobs with better work conditions, and it is a key element for reducing the gender wage gap.

Kolev and Sirven (2010) reported that in “sub-Saharan Africa, men earn twice as much as women on average, while in Ghana, among those with no education, men earn 57% more than women, but the gap shrinks to 24% among those with primary education and 16% with secondary education” (EFA GEM Report, 2014). Quality education has a huge positive effect on closing the gender wage gap.

Education not only can empower women to participate in the labour market but can eradicate from cultures and societies wrong bias and stereotypes about the role of women and girls. They are not born to be recluse inside the house to take care of children or elderly, and they are not just daughters, mothers or wives; they are individuals with the same potential and capacities of men, and they should be granted the same opportunities in every level.

2.6 Maternal and Infant Mortality Rate

Education is one of the most powerful ways of saving millions of lives. Improving education – women’s education in particular – is improving people’s chances of a healthier life and of having healthier future generations. Education provides people

information about diseases, and helps them recognizing earlier signs of illness and taking preventative measures. “Making sure that girls enter and complete lower secondary school is the key to unlocking education’s health benefits” (EFA GEM Report, 2014). Pneumonia is the leading cause of death in children, “accounting for 17% of the total worldwide. One additional year of maternal education can lead to a 14% decrease in the pneumonia death rate – equivalent to 160,000 child lives saved every year. Diarrhea is the fourth biggest child killer, accounting for 9% of child deaths” (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

If all women completed primary education, the incidence of diarrhea would fall by 8% in low and lower middle income countries; with secondary education, it would fall by 30%. The probability of a child being immunized against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough would increase by 10% if all women in low and lower middle income countries completed primary education, and by 43% if they completed secondary education (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Education is also an essential element to reduce malnutrition, another leading cause of child deaths. “Educated mothers are more likely to know about appropriate health and hygiene practices at home, and have more power to ensure that household resources are allocated so as to meet children’s nutrition needs. In low and lower middle income countries, providing all women with a primary education would reduce stunting – a robust indicator of malnutrition – by 4%, or 1.7 million children; providing a secondary education would reduce stunting by 26%, or 11.9 million children. By age 1, adverse effects of malnutrition on life prospects are likely to be irreversible” (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Gakidou (2010) conducted a study on the effects of education on child mortality in 175 countries and results proved that, between 1970 and 2009, increasing women’s education did reduce more than half the total number of child mortality under the age of five years. “Of the 8.2 million more children who survived past age five, increases in women’s educational attainment led to 4.2 million of them. This accounts for half the decrease in child mortality over forty years, meaning schooling of women of reproductive age makes a very large contribution to the health of their children” (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). Increasing levels of girls’ and women’s education have been proven as a vital element in reducing child mortality. At the same time, increasing girls’ education can help reduce

maternal mortality. Educated mothers are, in fact, less likely to die during pregnancy, childbirth, or the postpartum period.

Mothers die because of complications during pregnancy, such as pre-eclampsia, bleeding and infections, and because of unsafe abortion. Educated women are more likely to avoid these dangers by adopting simple and low cost practices to maintain hygiene, by reacting to symptoms such as bleeding or high blood pressure, by assessing how and where to have an abortion, by accepting treatment and by making sure a skilled attendant is present at birth (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

2.7 Reduces Rates of HIV/AIDS and Malaria

When young people have the opportunity to study and have higher levels of education, they are more likely to have a better knowledge about HIV/AIDS, and the ways to avoid infection. “Education represents the best opportunity not only for delivering crucial information on HIV/AIDS but also for chipping away at the ignorance and fear, the attitudes and practices that perpetuate infection” (UNICEF, 2004).

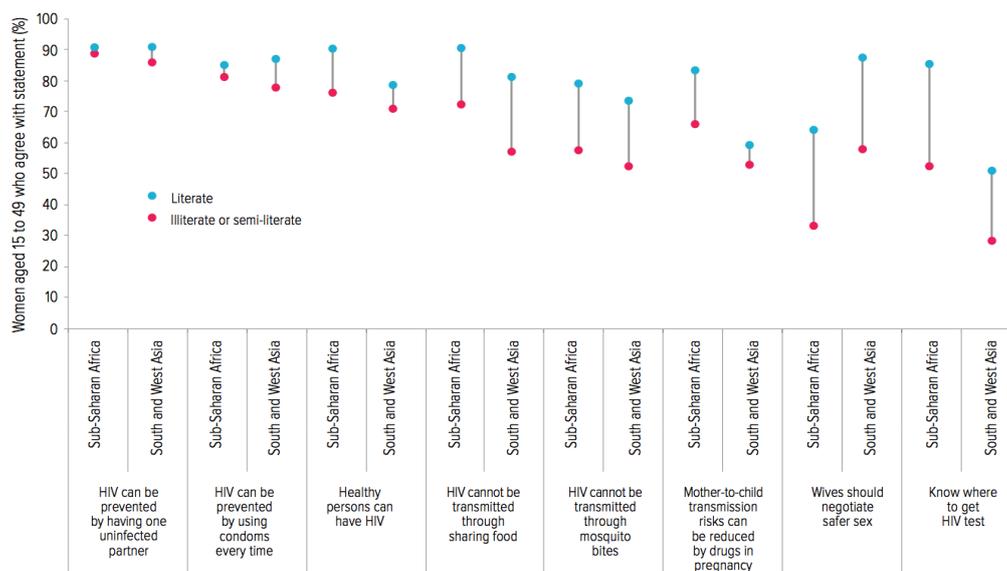
Although HIV/AIDS affect both men and women, gender inequality is one of the main factors that place women at greater risk of contracting HIV than men. “With girls and women more likely to be poorer and less educated than men, they are more likely to be financially and socially dependent on men. This power imbalance reduces young women’s choices as they negotiate their relationships with men, determine if and when to have sex, and even whether that sex is safe. In addition, poverty prevents poor women from receiving adequate health care and education – two essential elements for preventing HIV/AIDS” (UNICEF, 2004).

Data from a 2011 study in Zimbabwe (one of the countries with worst rates of HIV/AIDS) demonstrated that education was one of the main reason that contributed to the remarkably fast decline in infection rates of HIV (Halperin et al., 2011). “In 2010, 75% of Zimbabwe girls between the age of 15 and 24 attended and finished lower secondary school, and the HIV prevalence rate had fallen from its peak of 29% in 1997 to under 14%, declining four times faster than in neighboring Malawi and Zambia where education levels are lower” (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Another study showed the importance of literacy skills in improving people’s knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention in 26 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and 5 in South and West Asia (Figure 2).

These countries account for around half of all new infections among adults. In sub-Saharan Africa, 91% of literate women know that HIV is not transmitted through sharing food, compared with 72% of those who are not literate. In South and West Asia, where the infection rate is still increasing in countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, the gap in knowledge between those who are literate and those who are not is even wider: 81% of literate women know that HIV is not spread by sharing food, compared with 57% of those who are not literate. Misconceptions that HIV can be contracted through mosquito bites are also more widespread among those who are not literate in both South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Similar patterns hold for young men (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

Figure 2. Literacy enhances understanding of how to prevent and respond to HIV/AIDS



Source: EFA GEM Report (2014)

Girls’ education is often called “the *social vaccine* against HIV/AIDS because of the significant reduction in the incidence of that disease among better-educated girls and women” (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). This also holds for malaria, one of the world’s deadliest but most preventable diseases.

Improved access to quality education for women cannot replace the need for investment in drugs and in bed nets treated with insecticide – one of the most cost-

effective ways to prevent malaria – but it has a crucial role to play in complementing and promoting these measures. In India, literate people with schooling up to lower secondary level were more than twice as likely as illiterate people to know that mosquitoes are the transmitters of malaria. They were also about 45% more likely to know that malaria can be prevented by draining stagnant water (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

As proved by Ndjinga's and Minakawa's (2010) study, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (one of the countries with the highest rate of malaria-related deaths), more and better-educated women and men are more likely to use bed nets of about 75%.

Children are also much less likely to contract malaria if they have educated mothers. "The Malaria Indicator Surveys shows that the odds of children carrying malaria parasites was 44% lower if the mother had secondary education than if she had no education" (EFA GEM Report, 2014).

The power of education to help reduce rates of HIV/AIDS and malaria is undeniable. "Better-educated girls and women have more knowledge about how HIV is contracted and are better prepared to prevent transmission, as they are less likely to contract malaria, have children who are less likely to contract malaria and are more likely to use prevention techniques" (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). Education is not only a human right; it's an investment that has real positive effects and wide-ranging returns in every area of people's lives.

2.8 Reduces Support for Militancy

Terrorism is now more than ever a global issue. After the 9/11 attack, the overall level of fear for terrorist attacks grew into an ever-present feeling. Nevertheless, what needs to be kept in mind is that terrorism affects mostly and firstly those countries where it develops. "Chief amongst the factors which enable terrorist groups to survive and function in any context are support and sympathy for these groups and their goals within the population and elements of the government. Support for militancy and terrorism can range from a set of passive activities to more active participation. It can consist of condoning militant behavior, sympathy or agreement with the views and goals of terrorist groups, letting militants live in the community, encouraging them, harboring them, offering financial or logistical support to the terrorist group, etc." (Madiha, 2012). Cutting support for

terrorism and militant groups is essential to shut down their operations and survival. Moreover, according to studies made by the Central Asia Institute, “as women become more educated, they are less likely to support militancy and terrorism than similarly educated men” (CAI, 2017).

Young men and boys recruited by extremist groups are required to get their mother’s’ blessings before joining such an organization, or going on a suicide mission, the researcher noted. So, girls who are educated – especially who complete secondary school – grow up to be mothers who are less likely to give their sons permission to pursue violent solutions (CAI, 2016).

Madiha (2012) conducted a study on how educating Pakistani women can help cut the support for militancy in the country. “Uneducated women are likely to think that the Taliban taking over control of Pakistan would be a better thing relative to uneducated men, but the education of women reverses this relationship. More educated women (relative to similarly educated men) are also more likely to consider Islamic groups and local Taliban a threat (as are younger respondents), as they are to consider Al Qaeda to be a threat” (Madiha, 2012).

In Pakistan, education of boys and girls is different (e.g., the content taught could differ), and this is one of the reasons to drives the differences in support for terrorism. “Such differences are likely to stem from differences between girls’ public schools and boys’ public schools, such as variations in how male and female teachers teach” (Madiha, 2012). Even if the curriculum and the textbooks are the same by law, male and female teachers may give lectures differently to their respective students. “Understanding what works in girls’ schooling and what does not in boys’ schooling will not only help direct the focus on girls’ schooling, but also help inform how to reform boys’ schooling and male teaching to improve opinions on terrorism” (Madiha, 2012)

Ladbury (2015) found that raising the awareness of women and girls has a huge impact on helping to prevent radicalization and support to militancy groups. “As mothers, teachers and community activists, women are in a good position to notice the indoctrination of children, as they are most likely to detect changes in their behaviour. However, to be effective influencers, women need to understand the propaganda that young people are exposed to, and identify what they can do to limit its influence” (Ladbury, 2015). Educating women and girls can help societies to recognise, prevent and

stop the support for terrorism, giving women the skills and knowledge they need to actively dissuade young people from associating with a militant group. However, this is not easy: “poor women’s influence within patriarchal communities is *not* a given, boys in particular are more likely to be influenced by their peers than their mothers. If women have minimal education – secular and religious – they are unlikely to have the knowledge or arguments to counter the religious justifications for violence given by jihadi groups” (Ladbury, 2015). Education can increase women’s knowledge and give them skills and tools to counter extremism and terrorism and reduce support to militancy.

2.9 Reduces Harm to Families from Climate Change and Natural Disasters

Climate change can result in extreme weather and natural disasters. “More educated men and women tend to be more environmentally aware, more resilient to the impact of climate change, more productive and income generating, and more likely to live healthy lives, be politically engaged and exercise control over their lives” (EFA GEM Report, 2016).

Over the last two decades, recent studies that examined the social and economic aspects of natural disasters associated with reducing vulnerability found out that “around the world, women with higher levels of education appear to be more resilient in the face of crisis” (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015).

However, due to their weaker social-economic position, “women are differently and sometimes more seriously affected by climate change and natural disasters than men” (FEMM Committee, 2015). Existing gender inequalities make women more vulnerable and defenseless than men in relation to the consequences of extreme weather. Because they do not have the same access to resources, education, job opportunities and land as men, their possibilities to protect themselves and their families against adverse consequences of climate change and natural disasters are far less inferior. This is, of course, enhanced in the world’s poorest countries, where women are way more affected by gender inequality.

A recent study by King and Winthrop (2015) reviewing existing literature on girls’ education found that “more educated women are better able to protect themselves and their families from the effects of economic and environmental shocks. Even when shocks do not have differential gender effects, the absolute welfare losses for both men (and boys) and women (and girls) can be substantial. More educated mothers are able to protect

their children's welfare through a higher quality of care and their greater ability to mitigate adverse shocks, such as food price changes, that might reduce food intake” (King & Winthrop, 2015).

Wheeler and Hammer (2010) found that girls’ education is “one of the most cost-effective strategies to carbon-emissions mitigation” (Sperling & Winthrop, 2015). Their research suggests that girls’ education is “a major determinant of resilience in the face of weather-related shocks that are likely to increase with global warming. Using an econometric analysis of historical losses from weather-related shocks, we find that expanding women's education faster than currently-projected trends would prevent many thousands of deaths from floods and droughts, and hundreds of millions of cases of weather-related losses related to injuries, homelessness, and other forms of deprivation” (Wheeler and Hammer, 2010).

In general, natural disasters have more female than male victims. One of them is the unequal socio-economic status of women: for example, women in the poorest regions of the world can’t afford protective measures against natural disasters. Another reason is that “the traditional role of women as caretakers makes it more difficult for them to flee because they also have to protect children or elderly. Furthermore, their chances of survival are also influenced by the traditional roles of women in the society such as the fact that not all women learn how to swim, that women wait for their husbands or families before they leave the house, or that traditional clothing restrict the mobility and speed of women” (FEMM Committee, 2015). In the aftermath of disasters, due to their lack of financial resources, not only there is a higher risk of sexual violence, but women also have more difficulties to recover and rebuild their lives.

Women are not just victims; they are agents of change. Educated women can help to create and execute strategies related to aspects of climate change and global warming, including projects regarding disaster preparation and energy use.

Women should not only be included in the decision-making process but also in the execution of climate resilience policies. This can have a positive effect not only on the position of women but also on the execution and effectiveness of the policies themselves (FEMM Committee, 2015).

* * *

Gender inequality in education comes from many sources. From son-preference to deeply rooted social norms, women and girls are still today left to battle for their inalienable right to a quality education. This is unacceptable. Education is the key to empower women. It unlocks their full potential, providing them the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives.

What this chapter did was providing an overview of nine of the many real positive effects of girls' education and wide-ranging returns in areas that span from economic growth to climate change, from children's and women's survival rates and health to children's rights and child marriage. Promoting gender equality and the education of women and girls is also one of the most effective ways in the fight against hunger, diseases, and poverty, while also promoting democracy and peace.

Granting a quality education to women and girls is essential for both their empowerment and sustainable development. Giving them the opportunity to learn one or more languages different from their L1 can expand learning opportunities and provide them more possibilities for a better future. The importance of foreign language learning and its effects as a tool for empowering women is the core of the chapter that follows.

“If we consider that the vast majority of nations in the world are multicultural
and most of these are multilingual,
and that there are more bilinguals in the world than there are monolinguals,
we cannot fail to appreciate the immense
social relevance of language learning worldwide”⁴
– Zoltan Dörnyei

Chapter 3: Language education empowers women

3.0 Introduction

This chapter will focus on the relationship between language learning and how gender issues can influence second/foreign language acquisition, providing evidence on how knowing more than one language can help empower women from a social and economic point of view.

3.1 The Importance of learning foreign languages

Why is it so important to learn a foreign language? Especially in our time, being fluent in two or more languages can open up new horizons. Like most of the things in life, this is not an easy task. It might take years to master a foreign language, but it will drastically improve people’s lives.

Language education can create a whole new world of possibilities and career opportunities. In an increasingly competitive job market, speaking two or more languages can not only improve employment prospects with international companies but can also provide globally-minded people with essential tools to maintain international business relationships in several countries around the world. If an American corporation wants to start doing business with a potential client from China who speaks very little English, knowing Chinese will help the American company to better understand their client’s needs and cultural desires. Learning a new language also allows people to better understand a country and removes prejudices and misconceptions that they might have

⁴ Dörnyei, Z. (1994). *Motivation and Motivating in the Foreign Language Classroom*. The Modern Language Journal, 78(3), 273-284. doi:10.2307/330107

had in that particular country. Knowing or attempting to learn another language shows both how much someone is willing to do in order to keep a relationship and respect towards another culture.

Knowing foreign languages can also be a vital tool for women's economic empowerment. Today, women are still denied equal opportunities: they represent half the world's population but contribute far less than 50 percent to its economic activity (Lagarde, 2014). Women who can understand and speak not only their language but others too have more chances to be empowered from an economic point of view. They can have more employment opportunities and, most of all, access good quality jobs that are stable, decent, secure and productive. Limited or non-existent proficiency in a particular foreign language can be crippling for someone's business, and it can aggravate women's vulnerabilities even further. On the contrary, knowledge of a foreign language can be an incredible advantage.

Here's what former US President Barack Obama said during a campaign rally back in 2008 about bilingualism and the importance of better educating young people to participate in the global economy:

You know, it's embarrassing when Europeans come over here, they all speak English, they speak French, they speak German. And then we go over to Europe, and all we can say [is], "Merci beaucoup." Right? No, I'm serious about this. We should understand that our young people, if you have a foreign language, that is a powerful tool to get a job. You are so much more employable. You can be part of international business. So we should be emphasizing foreign languages in our schools from an early age, because children will actually learn a foreign language easier when they're 5, or 6, or 7 than when they're 46, like me (Barack Obama, 2008)

Learning foreign languages is not only a great way to improve someone's economic life, but numerous studies have demonstrated that one of the benefits of knowing more than one language is that it improves brain functions. However, through much of the 20th century bilingualism was seen as a negative asset: for a long time, educators, researchers, and policy-makers actually thought that speaking a second language affected children negatively, confusing them, putting them in a disadvantage situation compared to monolingual children, interfering with their cognitive development and holding them

back in academic and intellectual development (Schmid & Lowie, 2011). It was thanks to a study by Peal and Lambert (1962) that the negative myth of bilingualism began to fall apart: testing both bilinguals and monolinguals they found out that, especially on tests requiring mental manipulation, concept formation, and symbolic flexibility, bilingualism had a positive impact on cognitive abilities. Today, “bilingualism is no longer associated with a negative impact on cognitive development and this positive stance towards bilingualism has been the foundation of many bilingual education programs that have been initiated in the last 30 years” (Schmid & Lowie, 2011).

In 2011 Kroll said that the brain of bilingual people works differently from monolingual’s (Penn State News, 2011). Researchers from Penn State observed that the ability to speak more than one language and switch between two or more systems of speech represents a skill that can help people, especially children, in certain mental abilities: this does not make them more intelligent, but it helps to improve their memory, prioritizing tasks and focusing on relevant information.

A study on foreign language learning from the University of Chicago (Keysar et al., 2012) argued and showed that bilinguals tend to reduce certain biases and to be more rational in their decision-making process. “Even when people fully comprehend the meaning of taboo words, reprimands, expressions of love, and advertisement slogans, they react to them less emotionally in a foreign language [...] This reduction in emotional response might diminish the influence of affective processes and allow people to rely more on analytic processes when they make decisions” (Keysar et al., 2012). Six experiments conducted by the researchers focused on how the aversion of potential monetary loss diminishes as people evaluate the situation in a foreign language. The various shades of a language vocabulary can generate biases that can “lead people to ignore possible economic gains over this risk, but people who routinely make decisions in a foreign language rather than their native tongue might be less biased in their savings, investment, and retirement decisions. Over a long time horizon, this might very well be beneficial” (Keysar et al., 2012). Bilinguals are more rational and confident with their choices after considering it in the second language and checking if their initial decision is still valid.

Bilingualism can also make brains more resilient to Alzheimer’s dementia. A recent study (Perani et al., 2017) tested 85 patients in Northern Italy, all at a similar stage of dementia, 45 of whom were fluent in both Italian and German. The bilingual volunteers were on average five years older than the monolinguals, even if they were at the same stage of dementia, and they performed better on the short- and long-term verbal memory tests.

Using the bilingualism index, researchers found that bilinguals who used both Italian and German equally every day showed greater benefits than Italian or German monolinguals. Walton (2017) said:

In terms of lifestyle and risk of dementia, this type of study provides a vital piece of the puzzle – it doesn't just tell us that bilingualism is linked to reduced risk of dementia, it begins to tell us why. As societies become more multicultural, this study indicates that the benefits of bilingualism could extend to helping future generations reduce their risk of the condition (Alzheimer's Society, 2017).

Languages also have a very important social dimension: not only they can help people establishing cross-culture connections, but they can also be used to change people's perceptions. Noah (2016) provides a great example of how being fluent in more than one language can help people in their everyday life to overcome their biases and to navigate different cultures. Noah was born in South Africa during apartheid, the son of a black mother and white father, and grew up in the complex post-apartheid country. Being a mixed child, he was actually born a crime, because during apartheid the law prohibited interracial sexual relations and marriages between blacks and whites. Apartheid divided every identifiable skin color (white, black, colored and Indian) and subculture (Xhosa, Zulu, Ndebele, Swazi, Sotho, etc.) to weaken its opposition, but Noah identified in the power of language the power to "overcome" racism. Noah learned from his mother how speaking a foreign language can cross boundaries, and from a young age, he was able to speak many South African dialectics and tongues as well as English and the language of the white Afrikaners who ruled South Africa at the time. Today Noah speaks several languages including English, Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Tswana, Tsonga, Afrikaans and some German.

Language brings with it an identity and a culture, or at least the perception of it. A shared language says "We're the same." A language barrier says "We're different". The architects of apartheid understood this. Part of the effort to divide black people was to make sure we were separated not just physically but by language as well. In the Bantu schools, children were only taught in their home language. Zulu kids learned in Zulu. Tswana kids learned in Tswana. Because of this, we'd fall into the trap the government had set for us and fight among ourselves, believing that we

were different.

The great thing about language is that you can just as easily use it to do the opposite: convince people that they are the same. Racism teaches us that we are different because of the color of our skin. But because racism is stupid, it's easily tricked. If you're racist and you meet someone who doesn't look like you, the fact that he can't speak like you reinforces your racist preconceptions: He's different, less intelligent. A brilliant scientist can come over the border from Mexico to live in America, but if he speaks in broken English, people say, "Eh, I don't trust this guy." "But he's a scientist." "In Mexican science, maybe. I don't trust him." However, if the person who doesn't look like you speaks like you, your brain short-circuits because your racism program has none of those instructions in the code. "Wait, wait," your mind says, "the racism code says if he doesn't look like me he isn't like me, but the language code says if he speaks like me he...is like me? Something is off here. I can't figure this out (Trevor Noah, 2016).

3.2 Motivation in foreign language learning: self-motivation and imagination

Without motivation nothing would be achieved; success is hard to get, but when people are motivated, when people have a definite goal in their mind, they will more easily accomplish it. Every high achiever of this world has a motivation, as also the good language learner does.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed learning a new language, but the right motivation can provide the driving force to do it. Rubin (1975) credited motivation as an essential variable for good language learners, along with aptitude and opportunity. Gardner and Lambert (1959) introduced the concept of integrativeness/integrative motivation, arguing that language learning involved not only the acquisition of the language itself but also the willingness to do it in order to come closer to the other language community. However, Gardner and Lambert developed their theory in the French part of Canada, in Montreal, a multicultural setting in which both English and French play a significant role in the society. In that case, integrating with another ethnolinguistic group by taking on their language and culture can indeed provide motivation to learn a second language, but “in learning situations where a foreign language is taught only as a school subject without any direct contact with its speakers (e.g., teaching English or French in Hungary, China, Japan or other typical 'foreign language learning' contexts) the ‘integrative’ metaphor does not have any obvious meaning” (Dörnyei, 2009)

Dörnyei (2005, 2009) proposed a very interesting approach to L2 motivation in opposition to the concept of integrativeness/integrative motivation: the L2 Motivational Self System. He argued that the concept of integrativeness become somewhat irrelevant due to the worldwide globalization process. His goal was not to invalidate past results achieved in the field of L2 motivation, but to expand it within the *self-framework*.

Based on Markus and Nurius's (1986) psychological theory of the *possible self* and Higgins's (1987) theory on the *ought self*, Dörnyei's proposal was made up of three components: the Ideal L2 Self, the Ought-to L2 Self, and the L2 Learning Experience.

The Ideal L2 Self is a “powerful motivator to learn the L2 because of the desire to reduce the discrepancy between our actual and ideal selves” (Dörnyei, 2009). In other words, it is the learner's idea of what they could become as second language speakers, the future self that can inspire their present self to become what they know they can become. The Ought-to L2 Self “concerns the attributes that one believes one ought to possess to meet expectations and to avoid possible negative outcomes” (Dörnyei, 2009), while the L2

Learning Experience concerns “situated, executive motives related to the immediate learning environment and experience” (Dörnyei, 2009). The interaction between these three factors can result in the learner’s maximal motivational effectiveness to learn a foreign language.

The second and third components of this L2 Motivational Self System are to be considered external to the learner: the Ought-to L2 Self concerns the obligations and social pressures imposed by family, friends and other authoritarian figures, while the L2 Learning Experience is associated with a positive strategy or environment that can motivate the language learner. The Ideal L2 Self, on the other hand, comes from the learner him/herself; it refers to the learner’s desires, wishes, or dreams, what they ideally like to be or qualities they would like to have. To be an effective motivator, the ideal self must be in harmony with the others elements.

In the last ten years, many researchers have examined and proved the validity and applicability of the L2 Motivational Self System theory in many different environments. In a 2014 research by Tae-Young Kim and Yoon-Kyoung Kim, the authors focused on the relationship between perceptual learning styles, the ideal L2 self, motivated behavior, and English proficiency in Korean EFL students. The results of this study revealed that, in an EFL context, both the Ideal L2 Self and a motivated behavior lead to better English proficiency: the more motivated students are, and the more evident their Ideal L2 Self is, the higher level of English proficiency is successfully achieved. Another relevant research on the Ideal L2 Self was conducted in Pakistan by Islam, Lamb, and Chambers (2013): analyzing undergraduate students' motivation to learn English, the authors argued and showed that there is a strong correlation between the attitudes to the learning experience and Dörnyei’s Ideal L2 Self.

Ushioda (2008) said that the process of learning has to come from the learners’ own personal needs, goals, and interests. To maintain a high level of motivation, she argued that, “first, motivation must emanate from the learner, rather than be externally regulated by the teacher; second, learners must see themselves as agents of the processes that shape their motivation” (Ushioda, 2008).

This first component of the L2 Motivational Self System is the most important of the three motivational factors Dörnyei proposed in his theory, and could, therefore, be considered the fundamental element of L2 motivation.

Being self-motivated in learning a second/foreign language not only gives direction and confidence to become fluent in another language, but it provides the strength to do it with

persistence and efficiency. What we would ideally like to become is a significant push to transforms our ideas, aspirations, dreams, and desires into realities.

People differ in how easily they can generate a successful possible self, which means that a major source of any absence of L2 motivation is likely to be the lack of a developed ideal self in general or an Ideal L2 Self component of it in particular. Therefore, the first step in a motivational intervention following the self approach is to help learners to construct their Ideal L2 Self, that is, to create their vision (Dörnyei, 2009)

To create and strengthen this vision, and consequently motivate oneself, imagination plays a very important role. Dörnyei (2009) defined the concept of imagination as a central element of the self-motivation theory. He believes the inclusion of fantasy within the self-concept construct is what makes “the ideal and the ought selves suitable to be the lynchpins of a broad theory of L2 motivation [...] The dream or image of a desired future is the core content of the ideal self” (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009).

Imagination has a substantial motivational impact on every aspect of every day’s life; in his book, Dörnyei (2009) highlighted a quote on the key role played by imagination from Boyatzis and Akrivou’s (2006) analysis of the ideal self that seems perfect to make people understand the importance of imagination:

Throughout history of mankind, humans are driven by their imagination and their ability to see images of the desired future. Leaders, poets, writers, composers, artists, dreamers, athletes have been able to be inspired, stay inspired and inspire others through such images. These images, once shared, have the power to become a force, and in that sense an inspiration for social development and growth, for intentional change at many levels of social organization, not just for the individual (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006 qt. in Dörnyei, 2009)

3.3 Opportunity in Foreign Language Learning: what about girls?

After motivation, opportunity is another key element to always keep in mind when considering language education. Rubin (1975) listed both opportunity and motivation among the three variables a good language learner is said to depend on, the third being aptitude; she also argued they impinge on one another and that separating them is quite a difficult task:

An individual with lots of natural ability and motivation but with little opportunity may have difficulty in acquiring a language. If opportunity is present, but there is little motivation or poor learning skills, then we may expect that the language learning will proceed slowly. Equally, a person with lots of natural ability and opportunity may fail to learn because of poor motivation (Rubin, 1975)

Opportunity includes not only all the activities of a traditional frontal lesson but also all of those outside the classroom; in other words, opportunity of language learning is every chance a learner has to practice and be exposed to the language he/she is studying. Therefore, the good language learner should seize any occasion to exercise his/her language skills, seeking and creating opportunities to communicate and practice what he/she learned in school.

Dörnyei (1994) identified three different dimensions that can affect the average young student while learning a foreign language: first, the interest in different languages, cultures, and people; second, the willingness to become open-minded by expanding one's view and avoiding biases and provincialism; and third, the desire for new stimuli and challenges. However, the nature of the social and pragmatic aspects of foreign language learning in both opportunity and motivation "is always dependent on *who* learns *what* languages *where*" (Dörnyei, 1994).

Today, a common motivational phrase is 'you can do whatever you want' or also 'you can be everything you want', but sadly this is not true for everybody. The place a person comes from affects his/her possibilities and opportunities in every field, as well as their gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic background does. The second/foreign language learning field is no exception. A girl from Sri Lanka who wants to learn German as a foreign language will have fewer language learning opportunities than another girl of the same age born in France, as well as that same Sri Lankan girl will have less

opportunities of a boy of the same age and nationality as hers. Gender, family background, and socio-economical aspects are among the many factors that can influence access to equal educational opportunities.

Even if it is not a big issue as it was before, strong son-preference is also still a problem when it comes to investing in children's education. While doing research activity for the Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey, Jones et al. (2011) revealed that when families find themselves lacking economic resources, parents tend to prioritize sons' education, as explained by an 18-year-old girl, interviewed for the report, who had to drop out of school:

They forced me to stop my education... The reason why they gave [my brother] money for was that they were afraid that he might migrate... It is because I am female that I have been forced to drop out from school (Jones et al., 2011).

One of the most groundbreaking and influential education research ever conducted on the topic of educational opportunities is the 1966 Coleman Report. This 737-page report, involving around 3,000 schools, nearly 600,000 students, and thousands of teachers in all the United States, was one of the first studies on how socio-economic diversity can influence educational and economic success. The U.S. Office of Education commissioned the research in support of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act proposed by Lindon B. Johnson's administration as a part of his 'War on Poverty' policy, but while the Educational Act focused on the quality of education, funding primary and secondary education and emphasizing equal access to education, the Coleman Report found that most of the variations in student achievement appeared to be due to factors outside of the control of the schools; it had more to do with socio-economic factors and differences in the families' background than to the quality of schools. The findings of the Report were hence completely at odds with the series of actions behind the Education Act.

The first finding is that the schools are remarkably similar in the way they relate to the achievement of their pupils when the socioeconomic background of the students is taken into account. It is known that socioeconomic factors bear a strong relation to academic achievement. When these factors are statistically controlled, however, it appears that differences between schools account for only a small fraction of differences in pupil achievement (Coleman, 1966)

In the essay *'How Family Background Influences Student Achievement'*, one of the articles of the *Education Next* 2016 series celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Coleman Report, Egalite (2016) explained that family background was and still is today strongly associated with student performance in the U.S. The relation between family background and school performance that Coleman analyzed could have been the result of inequalities in school or neighborhood quality rather than family influences.

Often, families choose their children's schools by selecting their community or neighborhood, and children whose parents select good schools may benefit as a consequence. In the elusive quest to uncover the determinants of students' academic success, therefore, it is important to rely on experimental or quasi-experimental research that identifies effects of family background that operate separately and apart from any school effects (Egalite, 2016).

Egalite (2016) argued and showed how different components of family influences and the socio-economic status affect how students do in schools, from parental education and family income to family structure and parental incarceration (the latter variable being particularly relevant for the US since they account for almost 25% of the world's total prison population).

Schools alone can't level the vast inequalities that students bring to the schoolhouse door, but a combination of school programs, social services, community organizations, and civil society could make a major difference (Egalite, 2016).

As Kahneman (2011) puts it, success is the result of a combination of some amount of talent and luck, and great success involves a little more talent and a lot of luck, with luck being seen as the right chance or opportunity.

The inspirational phrase 'what you can achieve is limited only by your imagination' is beautiful, but not accurate. Not every child who wants to be a human rights lawyer or an astrophysicist can do it if she or he lacks the right opportunities. The same argument can be applied to the field of foreign language learning.

Gender differences in language education begin in schools, where girls (especially those from poor families and countries) typically have less access to equal schooling resources

and opportunities. However, foreign language education can no longer be considered as a simple school subject. “Language is seen not only as a tool for communication but as a key focus for the development of thinking, identity and personal growth” (Fleming, 2011). Denying equal opportunities to language learners is not only denying them the chance to be able to speak and communicate in a practical manner in a language different from their own, but it also means denying them the opportunity to grow, open their minds, and understand more of the world that surrounds them.

3.4 The gatekeeping nature of language education

Gatekeeping is the act of controlling, manipulating and limiting access to something, deciding who does or does not have certain rights to do something or be someone. It is a way to control and maintain power, as well as to create social hierarchies.

In many ways, language is a gatekeeper. It has both the power to bring people together and to keep them apart, driving a wedge in between them and acting as a barrier. Learning a language can give people access to better jobs, advanced levels of study or even to the chance to move to another country.

Language acts as a gate to keep out or a bridge that one crosses for access to powerful positions encouraged by language and rules. Not possessing the language, whether written or oral, remains a major device to maintain boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Moore, 2007).

Not knowing a language can make communication difficult and almost impossible; investing in language education will improve people's possibilities to fulfill their desires and achieve a certain level of success in life.

Moore (2007) reflected on the power of language in the schooling system, specifically how it can limit learning and teaching opportunities. Looking at the experiences of three African American secondary science teachers, Moore showed the gatekeeping function of language as a way to keep teachers from "learning, teaching, writing, and speaking about science in their classrooms and in their professional development as educators" (Moore, 2007).

In another research about the negative effects of limiting access to second/foreign language education, May (2007) called language the gatekeeper of humanity. In her study about the impact and implications of language in South Africa's education policies, May examined the sociological role of language as a tool of oppression, dehumanization, and injustice in post-apartheid South Africa.

Language has been used by those in power as a weapon of oppression against languages, cultures and traditions. In few places is the use of language as a tool of oppression and dehumanization more pervasive than in post-apartheid South Africa [...] Language differences are not oppressive in and of themselves; the

concern is the socially constructed meanings of inferiority that accompanies their use and the culture and traditions attached to them (May, 2007).

In the history of South Africa, many were the laws aimed at controlling the language use of native African tribes, giving them access only to an inferior education as they were considered a 'racially inferior' people. "The Bantu Act No. 47 of 1953, also known as the 'Slave Education Act', was fueled by Afrikaans speaking South Africans who perceived the acquisition of the English language by Blacks as a threat to the superiority of their language" (May, 2007), while the *Language-in-Education Policy Act 27 of 1997* granted nine native indigenous languages the status of official language to "promote multilingualism through the use of the student's mother tongue" (May, 2007). However, the result was that each African group was taught in their mother-tongue, perpetuating the segregated education apartheid created and leaving English as the language of the elite. Even if promoting the teaching and learning in the nine native languages seemed to be a cultural achievement, the absence of one shared language contributed to preventing the rise of the Black South African learners from their all-rounded oppression state.

Much like a slave is grateful for the blessing to escape a lashing, the direct service providers in this study appear grateful for the blessing of escaping apartheid and the freedom to have a school and access to running water [...] This lack of consciousness is essential to the oppressors as the awakening of critical consciousness leads the way to expression of social discontents precisely because these discontents are real components of an oppressive situation [...] In the years since apartheid was officially removed from the books, over 70% of native speaking Africans still do not comprehend English [...] Theoretically, English was to be the pathway to liberation, but in practice the vast number of black South Africans have not been able to realize its benefits (May, 2007).

English was hence seen as an elite property, emphasizing the inferiority of the people and culture that were using other languages. With her study, May did not want to criticize the English language by itself; instead, she wanted to analyze and discuss the power and prestige obtained by those who used English, along with the limited power and prestige that characterized those who did not. South Africa's language policies aimed at keeping

people oppressed, divided and unaware of the power that education could give them, manipulating language into becoming a convenient and effective gatekeeper of humanity. Pavlenko (2001) discussed gatekeeping practices related to issues of bilingualism and gender. In her study, the author questioned the conventional approach to bilingualism and gender, suggesting that “it is not the essential nature of femininity or masculinity that defines the patterns of bilingualism, language maintenance or language shift, but rather the nature of gender, social, and economic relations, and ideologies of language and gender that mediate these relations” (Pavlenko, 2001). Focusing on bilingualism and language maintenance, she presented and analyzed some situations in which the knowledge of the primary language is favored by everyone in the community and others in which gender relations in majority and minority communities left women behind, exploiting linguistic practices as means of oppression and gatekeeping.

In her paper, Pavlenko reviewed many studies made in the 1990s that contraposed the benefits and privileges associated with the knowledge of a second language with the gatekeeping effects associated with the lack of language education of women and the practices that restricted their mobility and access to the workplace.

Goldstein's (1995) investigation of linguistic practices in a Canadian factory demonstrated that the unspoken rules of this workplace prevented immigrant Portuguese women from using English by posing Portuguese as a solidarity code [...] She emphasizes that gender relations in the immigrant Portuguese community also limit women's access to educational opportunities by preventing them from attending ESL classes as it is considered unacceptable for them to be in the same classroom with male strangers (Pavlenko, 2001).

As bilingualism can entangle many different gendered patterns of gatekeeping that can prevent women from being fluent in two or more languages, so language maintenance and transmission can damage women's empowerment and development. Pavlenko (2001) argued and showed that language maintenance, as a resistance strategy to the majority language and culture, can be used as an oppressive practice “in which case the group, assigned to maintain the minority language and transmit it to children, may enjoy less access to the majority one” (Pavlenko, 2001).

As a gatekeeping practice, the role of “guardians of the home language” may be enforced and not taken up by choice. Interestingly, in the latter case, it is always women who are positioned in this role, whether they aspire to it or not (Pavlenko, 2001)

This role unofficially associated with women as keepers of language traditions can bound them to only minority communities, preventing women from learning or using another language, as well as limiting their access to working opportunities and restricting their financial independence.

When linguistic practices become strategies of oppression and gatekeeping, they are usually used against women — by men as well as by women who internalized them — through ideologies of language and gender that link a particular phenomenon to femininity in positive or negative ways. Thus, language maintenance, accompanied by the task of language transmission, may appear as a gatekeeping strategy that limits women’s access to the symbolic capital of the majority language (Pavlenko, 2001)

Limited or non-existent proficiency in a particular foreign language can be crippling for someone’s business, and it can aggravate women’s vulnerabilities even further. On the contrary, the knowledge of a foreign language can be an incredible advantage.

In an article for UNGEI, Ojha (2010) gave a clear and important example of this, reporting the experience of the ‘Thari’ women (Indo-Pak war refugees from Pakistan). In the northwestern part of the Indian continent, between India and Pakistan, the Thar Desert makes women’s lives more complicated and challenging due to its harsh region and extreme temperatures. The unique skill of these ‘Thari’ women is Sindhi Kadhai, a particular kind of embroidery of Sindh, Pakistan; they create and produce beautiful hand-embroidered cloths and, in time, they had to learn to understand the dynamics of the markets. “Language as a life skill involves negotiation of power” (Ojha, 2010) and it can be an incredibly important resource during business negotiations. In her article, Ojha discussed how today many women of Thar Desert had learned language-communication skills to participate in the marketing and decision-making processes, proving in this way their worth to their society.

They now understand the meaning of many technical words and use them frequently in their mother tongue 'Thari'. They also speak Marwari, Hindi and some English. The interplay of these languages has enriched their own vocabulary in Thari and has widened their worldview. Their meetings and interactions with their coordinators and designers of international fame have also given them opportunities to enter the new world of buyers. [...] It has been a long way for these Thari women, from local to global markets, a journey from silence to speech. It is fascinating to see these rural women without Ghunghat (veil), and wonderful to see that men of the families are supportive to them. Some now help in the kitchen, as their wives are busy in embroidery work and their daughters are studying in schools (Ojha, 2010)

These women artisans are now a significant contribution in providing and increasing their families' income, and their status as part of society has incredibly improved. They learned not only a new language and how to communicate effectively, they learned a way of expressing their freedom, developed leadership, negotiation, participation and decision-making skills, and they learned how to live their lives with confidence.

Another example of how learning a foreign language can help women's social-economic situation is provided by Kobayashi's (2002) study "that suggested that marginalised young Japanese women were more interested than men in studying second languages in order to increase their limited choice of employment opportunities" (Rind et al., 2015). For these women, language education represented a way of empowering themselves and providing them the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives.

The gatekeeping nature of language education can hence have both negative and positive implications. Controlling and limiting access to second/foreign language education, based on race-ethnicity, class, culture and gender differences, creates barriers, inequality in power and contributes to arrest development for families and societies. However, granting a quality and equal language education to all can indeed improve people's lives, providing them access to better jobs or amplifying their mobility, as well as having substantial positive effects on a global scale.

3.5 Is Language Learning a Feminine Domain?

The long-standing belief that women are better at languages than men and the reason why girls outperform boys in the field of language learning has been a popular topic of research for many years now. Many linguists argued that women are better language learners because of their natural features for speaking and their inborn characteristics. Is there any truth to this theory? Is language learning a feminine domain, or it only seems that way due to the influence of stereotypical beliefs?

3.5.1 Gender and Language according to Feminist Poststructuralism

During the last couple of decades, several scholars conducted studies on the relationship between language learning and how gender issues can influence second/foreign language learning. However, many of these researchers were based on two outdated approaches that lead to oversimplified generalizations on language learning and use based on the ‘innate’ differences between males and females (*cultural feminism*) and on the theory that capitalism and patriarchy are key factors for gender hierarchies favoring male dominance (*material feminism*) (Norton & Pavlenko, 2004).

Based on a combination between feminism and poststructuralism, and developed from the ideas on power, knowledge and discourses of Derrida (1987) and Foucault (1972), Weedon (1987) proposed a new “way of conceptualizing the relationship between language, social institutions and individual consciousness that focuses on how power is exercised and on the possibilities of change [...] making the primary assumption that it is language which enables us to think, speak and give meaning to the world around us” (Weedon, 1987).

In agreement with Weedon’s feminist poststructural framework, Norton & Pavlenko (2004) discussed and widened the view of gender, saying that this concept cannot be considered as a simple male/female dichotomy or an individual property, but it has to be considered as “a complex system of social relations and discursive practices differentially constructed in local contexts [...] Gender emerges as one of many important facets of social identity which interacts with race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, (dis)ability, age, and social status” (Pavlenko, 2001).

3.5.2 Gender Stereotyping

A widely spread belief is that, in the language learning field, women do better than men, with girls outperforming boys both in their native tongue as well as in second/foreign language study.

“Sciences are for boys, humanities for girls, women are literary and men are mathematical, women are more verbal and therefore learn languages easily, languages are girls’ subjects, girls are better at language learning than boys” (Schmenk, 2004). These are all suggestive phrases based on popular preconceptions, stereotypes involving gender and language learning, which have influenced learners and teachers for generations.

Stereotypes are fixed general ideas that group people into specific categories based on the assumption they will be in a particular way. In the case of gender stereotypes, these are the results of the male/female dichotomy that highlights every difference between males and females in order to separate them into two defined and opposite groups. However, following the poststructuralist view on gender, this classification depending on what is commonly considered to be typically feminine or masculine is too general and can lead to misconceptions; in fact, “generalist assumptions about gender often claim to reflect universal phenomena about men and women” (Schmenk, 2004), but instead they are conceived regardless of social, cultural, or historical contexts.

Over time, gender stereotypes made language learning appear like a predominant feminine domain. Schmenk (2004) argued that three are the aspect that could have influenced stereotypes about language and gender: “(a) the claim that gender is a differentiating variable, (b) the claim that language learning success is causally linked to a person’s gender, and (c) the observation that girls and women worldwide tend to study languages more often than boys and men do” (Schmenk, 2004).

A concept that could help to explain this gender gap in academic performance is the ***stereotype threat***. Introduced by Steele and Aronson (1995), this hypothesis has been shown to influence and reduce the performance of the negatively stereotyped groups. The fear of confirming negative stereotypes regarding a specific group could generate anxiety and lower the performance of that group members, even if the individual is not subscribed to the stereotype for it to be activated. An example of gendered stereotype threat, which has been subject to many studies and investigations, is that “men are better than women in Math”. Quinn & Spencer (2001) first analyzed this common stereotype threat testing

whether or not this could explain the fact that women achieved lower results than men in solving advanced mathematical problems at university level. “Their hypothesis was that women are threatened by the knowledge of the women-can’t-do-math stereotype and the fear of confirming it with their own performance in a mathematical test depresses their capability of formulating solving strategies” (Colarieti-Tosti, 2007). In their study, they evaluated the results of a mathematical multiple-choice test performed by both men and women; the test was the same for everyone, but half of them had an extra sentence regarding gender in their instructions. Doing so, they created two subgroups, a control group without the extra sentence and a test group with the extra sentence. In the first case, the results did not “show differences between men and women when the problems were converted into their numerical equivalents” (Quinn & Spences, 2001). However, in the second case, “the results indicate that, when stereotype threat was high, women were less able to formulate problem-solving strategies than when stereotype threat was reduced. These findings suggest that the knowledge of cultural stereotypes changes the testing situation for women such that their performance is depressed” (Quinn & Spences, 2001). The opposite of stereotype threat is *stereotype boost*, which analyzes how the exposure to positive stereotypes can improve performance, e.g., women are better than men in learning languages. This particular stereotype boost comes from the common belief that women have superior linguistic and social skills.

Girls are more likely to stress co-operation and learn to deal sensitively with relationships, whereas boys emphasize establishing and maintaining hierarchical relations and asserting their identity. The female “culture” seems to lend itself more readily to dealing with the inherent threat imposed to identity by L2 learning (Ellis, 1994).

Ellis assumed that female superiority in L2 learning was “characterized by cooperative behavior and sensitivity in dealing with relationships, causes successful language learning” (Schmenk, 2004). However, he failed to explain how gender can influence language learning performance without falling into stereotypical and generalist assumptions.

Common stereotypes influence environments both inside and outside the language classroom. Understanding the process of creating stereotype patterns for the sexes is vital to reduce these generalist beliefs and resist stereotyping.

3.5.3 Are women really better at learning languages?

The reason why girls outperform boys in the field of language learning has been a popular topic of research for many years now, but until a decade ago, no one had ever clearly provided a biological reason that may account for female/male differences in language learning (Heinzmann, 2009). For a long time, studies documenting the superiority of girls' language skills have based their researches on the long-standing belief that women are better language learners because of their natural features for speaking and their inborn characteristics. As it was explained before, the feminist poststructuralist perspective does not rely on the simple, binary conceptualization of gender; it needs more information to account the linguistic difference between men and women.

To explain this gap in performance, many linguists argued and showed that differences in motivational factors could account for these gender differences in language learning, but even then “the general pattern of girls being more highly motivated to learn FLs than boys does not seem to hold equally true for all languages” (Heinzmann, 2009). In a study about motivation in second language learning, Dornyei et al. (2006) presented the results of a large 12-year-long research on Hungarian secondary school students in learning five different foreign languages: English, German, French, Italian, and Russian. English, the most popular language among all the students, appeared to be ‘gender-neutral’ with respect to student motivation, while French and Italian were favored by female students as were German and Russian by male students. Similar results were presented by Carr & Pauwels (2006) in an Australian secondary school context, where some foreign languages like French, Italian, Spanish, and German, were “perceived as more feminine languages than Chinese, Japanese, and Russian” (Heinzmann, 2009).

Language learning strategies were also used to explain gender differences in language learning. Since a 1989 study on university students' strategies by Oxford & Nyikos, sex was included among the important variables affecting strategy use by language learners, and years later, using Oxford's SILL (Strategy Inventory for Language Learning) questionnaire, Božinović & Sindik (2011) investigated gender difference in the use of learning strategies among adult language learners. Their results showed that “female students used all learning strategies more frequently than their male counterparts, with the exception of socio-affective strategies, which corresponds to the findings of previous researchers” (Božinović & Sindik, 2011).

Strategies and motivation can account only in part for the differences in performance between girls and boys; how gender influence language learning is still far from being well understood, and the reason why women generally perform better than man on language tasks is yet a question that needs a proper, in-depth answer. However, recent interdisciplinary studies in the field of psycholinguistics tried to account for these gender differences in L2 learning.

A 2008 study from the Northwestern University and the University of Haifa provided a first biological reason for sex differences in language production, showing that “areas of the brain associated with language work harder in girls than in boys during language tasks, and that boys and girls rely on different parts of the brain when performing these tasks” (Burmam et al., 2007). Using functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), an imagining technique that measures blood flow in the brain, researchers measured brain activity in 31 boys and 31 girls (ages 9-15) while they performed spelling and writing language tasks presented in two modalities, visual and auditory. Results from this study showed girls having significantly greater activation of language area of the brain than boys; “activation in frontal and temporal regions was bilaterally stronger among girls than boys. This activation, in turn, could be positively correlated both with performance accuracy in language tasks and with word identification skills in standardized tests, suggesting that increased activation in these areas is beneficial for performance and unique to females” (Wucherer & Reiterer, 2016). This patter, if extended into adulthood (a question that the authors classified as still unresolved) could help explaining gender differences in language performances.

A more recent study by Wucherer & Reiterer (2016), which was informed by neuroscientific research, used psycholinguistics measures to “investigate the gender gap in two linguistic realms, namely phonetic imitation ability and grammar learning” (Wucherer & Reiterer, 2016). They analyzed the performance of 64 participants, 32 males and 32 females (ages 19-29) with same linguistic and educational background, regarding gender and personality/motivation differences, and the results showed a linguistic gender gap in two domains of L2 expertise, casting doubts on the long-standing belief of a general female language superiority: male subjects, in fact, outperformed their female counterparts in phonetic imitation ability (pronunciation), while women outperformed men in grammar learning.

Our results represent a first step towards a de-stigmatization of language as a 'girlie' subject, rendering the broad term 'general female advantage in (foreign) languages' as not scientifically supportable. Rather, males and females both seem to possess specific (foreign) language talents/aptitudes – however, in different areas. Therefore, as other researchers, we, too, advocate the idea that the success of male and female L2 learners differs depending on the type of language task. For the field of language learning/teaching, it is vital to shed light into the darkness (of linguistic gender gap) in order to develop ways which offer maximum assistance in facilitating individual proficiency in a foreign language, and, therefore, make maximum success possible (Wucherer & Reiterer, 2016).

3.6 Empowering Women Through English Language Learning

The English language has a unique role in today's society. It is used as an official or semi-official language in over 60 countries, with approximately 400 million who use English as their first language (L1); at the same time, English ranks as number 1 for the number of L2 speakers, approximately 900 million. With a total of 1.5 billion speakers out of the 7.5 billion of the world population, English is the most used language in the world (Ethnologue, 2017), a *lingua franca of the modern world* (Graddol, 1997). Globally, it is the language that is most often taught as a foreign language in schools; it's the language of economics and business, education, and media, and has a considerable role in international communication and relationships as one of the six official languages of the United Nations as well as many other international organizations (e.g., the International Space Station and the International Olympic Committee).

The importance of English as a global language in today's society is undeniable. English as an international language (EIL) is a tool for educational and socio-economic empowerment on a global scale. It has the power to expand learning opportunities and provide more possibilities for a better future, both locally and internationally. English proficiency not only brings benefits to individuals, but it connects people globally.

Being of such importance in the modern world, the EIL can also play a vital role as a self-empowering tool. Rido (2011) conducted a study on this very subject, showing how English contributed to the development of rural Indonesian students' self-esteem. Documenting students' experiences with English, Rido found that the mastery of the English language enabled them to have access to better learning and knowledge (e.g., they can access a lot of information available only in English supported by the Internet), more scholarship and exchange opportunities, as well as the chance to be self-empowered and develop the confidence to face future challenges.

When it comes to learning English, women often face worse obstacles compared to men from the same country or socio-economic group. Reflecting on the concept of empowerment through language education, Esch (2009) claimed that English Language Education could lead to empowerment when it's considered as a means to expand someone's possibilities; however, this is all related to who has access to language education. Gender differences play a huge role in this, decreasing girls' opportunities from the enrollment stage. English Language Education can empower women providing

them the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives and making purposive choices on both economic and social scale.

In addition to all the material benefits and opportunities that the English language can present, broadening socio-economic opportunities for women is one of the most important perks of EIL. In a paper about this potential life-changing role of English as a Second Language (ESL), Mohammadian (2014) discussed how “English language learning can be empowering by affecting women’s imagined communities and bringing about new opportunities for them, especially for those who come from less privileged families in third world countries and the Middle East” (Mohammadian, 2014). Analyzing the empowerment of Saudi and Iranian women in relation to learning English, Mohammadian showed how learning ESL could widen their educational opportunities and independence, making them eligible for scholarships and universities in English-speaking countries and, most importantly, making them part of a global society. In Saudi Arabia, women are financially supported by their government to pursue their education abroad:

It should be noted that in the Middle East there has been a growing trend in gender segregation, which dominates many workplaces including educational settings and medical centers. As a result, there is an increasing demand for educated women to provide services to other women. Although in Arab culture merely men are the breadwinners of families, and women are not expected to help with family expenses, there are women who do choose to work in Arab society, despite the situation, and may benefit from this experience through a sense of autonomy [...] This is a form of women’s empowerment, which has the potential to gradually eliminate gender subordination and male dominance, as well as bridge the gap between the social roles of men and women in the context of Saudi Arabia (Mohammadian, 2014).

Talking about the situation in Iran, Mohammadian (2014) said that English proficiency can also expand access to sources of information and news. Due to information censorship, people are often restricted to only certain types of perspectives and Islamic views; only those who have access to international media and news can be truly part of an international society. English media, books, the Internet and other resources are more easily accessible to those who know the English language.

Language can act as a barrier, precluding jobs opportunities as well as isolating and marginalizing people, but proficiency in an international language such as English can open up countless doors. EIL can give women, who are struggling to emerge or to assert their rights, the opportunity to make their voice heard, to improve their quality and access to education as well as increasing their employment opportunities and quality of life.

* * *

Based on Weedon's feminist poststructuralist framework on the relationship between language learning and how gender issues can influence second/foreign language acquisition, this chapter provided evidence on how knowing more than one language can help empower women from a social and economic point of view.

Being fluent in two or more languages can bring around countless benefits. Controlling and limiting access to second/foreign language education, based on gender differences, creates barriers, but granting a quality and equal language education to all can indeed improve people's lives, providing them access to better jobs or amplifying their mobility, as well as having huge positive effects on a global scale. Denying equal opportunities in language learning to women is not only denying them the chance to be able to speak and communicate in a practical manner in a language different from their own, but it also means denying them the opportunity to grow, open their minds, and acquire the knowledge needed to be empowered and direct their own lives.

The importance of English as a global language in today's society is undeniable. English as an international language is the perfect tool for to expanding learning opportunities and providing more possibilities for a better future. The next chapter will present the specific case of Nepalese women and how the English language is a tool for educational and socio-economic empowerment on a global scale.

“If you educate a man, you empower an individual.
If you educate a woman, you empower an entire nation”⁵
- African Proverb

Chapter 4 – Nepal: a Case Study

4.0 Introduction

The preceding chapters have discussed the relationship between language learning and how gender issues can influence second/foreign language acquisition. This final chapter of the thesis will present the specific case of Nepalese women and how the English language is a tool for educational and socio-economic empowerment on a global scale.

4.1 Education in Nepal

The education system in Nepal is one of the youngest in the world. In its very beginning, it was based on home-schooling and *gurukulas*, where gurus were responsible for teaching students. The first formal school was established in 1853, but it was intended for the education of the children of elite and advantaged groups. It was not until a century later, with the birth of Nepalese democracy in 1951, that schools were formally opened to the public (Bista, 2011).

In 1952, the Ministry of Education was established for the development of education in the country, mainly school education. The National Education System Plan (NESP) was set up in 1971 to reform school curriculum with vocational education as the focus. An education system with an extensive structural provision was developed with District Education Office (DEO) and supervision system in all the districts. Gender-focused educational programs were started in late the 1970s and early 1980s.

In April 2000, The World Education Forum on EFA in Dakar, Senegal, Nepal adopted the Education for All Framework for Action, six goals set to improve all aspects of the quality of education, including granting equitable access and eliminating gender inequality.

⁵ African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories, <http://www.afriprov.org/african-proverb-of-the-month/25-1999proverbs/146-sep1999.html>

As education is a key in the continued economic and social development of the country, Nepal has been making efforts to provide access to primary as well as secondary school to children through various programs in order to achieve the goal of EFA. Despite efforts such as literacy campaigns and free education for children, education is not accessible to all due to its indirect cost. Therefore, even basic education is still a privilege enjoyed only by a segment of population regardless of cost. Thus the country is still facing the challenge to achieve EFA (Adhikari, 2013).

After the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) expired in 2015, Nepal joined other members of the UN in adopting the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The post-2015 agenda brought a new set of goals, which are the main objects of the global development agenda spanning from 2015-2030, and which include improving quality and achieving gender equality at all levels of education.

After schooling for the public started in 1951, the adult literacy rate (the percentage of people ages 15 and above that can read and write) was just 5 percent with about 10,000 students in just 300 schools and two colleges. After the introduction of a complete Education Plan in 1971, the education system began rapidly its development (Parajuli & Das, 2013).

A 2013 study sponsored by UNESCO on literacy status in Nepal reported an increased literacy rate from 1991 to 2011. Directly from the report, Table 1 shows an annual growth rate of circa 2.0 percent for male literacy, while female literacy status is very low but the gender gap trends onwards 2001 indicated a positive impact on the female literacy status.

Table 1: Literacy status in Nepal by age 15+

Census year	Total	Female	Male	Gender Gap
1981	20.6	9.2	31.6	22.4
1991	33.0	17.4	49.2	31.8
2001	48.6	34.9	62.7	27.8
2011	59.6	48.8	71.7	22.9

Source: Literacy status in Nepal by age group 15+ report, UNESCO (2013)

According to the latest CIA World Factbook update, Nepal's adult literacy rate was estimated at 63.9% (53.1% for females and 76.4% for males) in 2015 (CIA, 2018). "Male-female gender gap though decreasing is still noticeable and prevails across almost all

castes and ethnic groups, rural and urban areas, eco-zones, development regions, and income groups” (EFA National Review Report, 2015).

4.1.1 School System in Nepal

Until a couple of years ago, the school system in Nepal mainly consisted of pre-school education or early childhood development (ECD), for children from 3 to 4 years old; primary education level (grades 1-5), the entry age at grade 1 is 5 years old; basic education level (grades 1-8), including five years of primary and three years of lower secondary; secondary level (grades 9-10); higher secondary level (grades 11-12) (EFA National Review Report, 2015). With the 2016 Education Act revision, the school level education will be simply divided into Basic and Secondary level (Gautam, 2016). Higher education level consists of Bachelor’s (3-4 years), professional/technical programs (4-5 years), Master’s (2 years), and Ph.D. degrees.

Within the education system, there are two types of schools in Nepal, public (government schools) and private schools. “Public schools are run through the budget allocated by the government while private schools they have to arrange money by themselves for the school opening and running” (Parajuli & Das, 2013). Despite the increasing expenditure on public education, public schools have been criticized for not being able to provide quality education and for the unsatisfactory performance results. “Along with government, other Non-Government organizations (NGOs), community, parents, donor agencies and so forth have invested both money and efforts for the betterment of the public schools” (Parajuli & Das, 2013). This public/private division in education is partly related to a language barrier: private schools use English as the medium of instruction, while public schools use Nepali. This language difference is strengthening a class division on a much wider scale (Unicef, 2011).

Besides the formal education, there are also provisions of non-formal education: the Out-of-school programme (OSP) for those who could not attend primary school, the School Out-Reach Programme for those who do not have schools nearby, and the Non-Formal Education Centre (NFEC) that provides various forms of adult education programs.

According to the national census 2011, the contribution of non-formal education in the overall educational attainment of people in Nepal is 4.15 percent, with 3.49

percent for males and 4.95 percent for females (EFA National Review Report, 2015).

4.1.2 Education Inequalities

For many families, girls' education is not a priority. In fact, Nepal has one of the highest indices of son preference in the world. “In this practice, boys pass on the family name and support their parents' future economy [...] The girls are considered only as a member of her husband's family” (Adhikari, 2013). So, if the parents find themselves lacking economic resources, parents tend to prioritize sons' education.

In the 2016 UNPD Human Development Report, Nepal ranked 144 out of 182 countries in the human development index (HDI) and 119 in gender-related development index (GDI). Gender discrimination is a major problem in Nepal, a problem that affects educational opportunities for girls, creating and feeding social and cultural norms that are discriminating against girls and women, keeping them out of schools.

Beside son-preference, child marriage is also a big problem that keeps girls from attending school. “Early marriage also leads to early pregnancies, which minimizes their chance of returning to schools” (Gautam, 2016). Child marriage is illegal in Nepal but is still socially accepted and pervasive. Girls with supportive families behind them can avoid early marriage arrangements and complete their school education, with a few even having the chance to attend university.

Another big issue that represents a challenge in keeping girls in school is the social tradition of *chhaupadi*, a practice in which girls face restrictions during menstruation. This tradition is widespread all across the country and prohibits Hindu women from participating in normal family activities while menstruating, as they are considered “impure”. Young girls are hence restricted from going to school. As Gautam (2016) pointed out, “in urban areas, where girls usually have access to commercially produced sanitary products, their attendance is not affected”. Moreover, schools' conditions also present challenges. Many don't have separate toilets for boys and girls, and some don't have toilets at all. Obstacles such as these make it more likely for them to drop out of school (usually in high school or grade 8), or fall behind in their studies. The Supreme Court of Nepal outlawed *chhaupadi* in 2005, but this discriminatory tradition has been slow to die. In 2017, Nepal passed a bill punishing people who force women into exile

during menstruating, with a penalty to spend up to three months in jail or a fine of 3,000 Nepalese rupees (about \$29).

The lack of female teachers is also a problem. Since many topics like menstruation are still taboo, when teenage girls have questions regarding their body changes or their health, they often cannot discuss them at home, so they tend to turn to their teachers. Not surprisingly, girls prefer to share their problems with female teachers. “However, females represent only 32 percent of teachers: 38 percent in primary schools, 21 percent in lower secondary schools and only 14 percent at the secondary level, because few women have the bachelors’ degree they need to teach at this level [...] Moreover, some conservative parents feel insecure sending adolescent daughters to schools without female teachers and pull them out when they reach secondary level” (Gautam, 2016).

Today, Nepal is still characterized by a wide gender disparity in the education system and still has a long way ahead before ending education inequalities. However, during the last 70 years, Nepal has made some remarkable progress promoting gender equality at all levels of education, especially in primary/secondary education.

Educational Attainment

As far as educational attainment concerns, the 2016 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey reported that “two in five women and one in five men in Nepal have no education, 35% of women and 47% of men have a secondary education or higher, and the median number of years of schooling is more than double among men than women (4.6 versus 2.1)”.

There is also a difference in access to education among women and men from different backgrounds: “rural women (47%) and men (26%) are more likely than urban women (35%) and men (17%) to have no education, and only 2% of women and 3% of men from the lowest wealth quintile have more than a secondary education, as compared with 25% of women and 34% of men from the highest wealth quintile” (2016 NDHS). Table A and B from the Nepal DHS 2016 (see Appendix) shows the educational attainment of both female and male household population (age 6 and over) according to background characteristics.

Enrolment

Data from the 2015 EFA National Review Report revealed encouraging trend during 2005-2012, with the enrolment of girls increased by 2.5% per year. In 2006, girls' gross enrolment rate (GER) in Early Childhood Development (ECD) was 40.9% but increased to 73.1% in 2012. Also in 2006, "the gap between boys' and girls' net enrolment rate (NER) at primary level was 3.8%, but by 2012 this gap decreased to 1.2%. At lower secondary and secondary levels as well, girls' NER has shown gradual progress" (EFA National Review Report, 2015).

The 2017 National Review of Sustainable Development Goals reported that "the ratio of girls to boys in primary education increased from 0.79 in 2000 to 1.09 in 2015, while the ratio of girls to boys in secondary education increased from 0.70 in 2000 to 1.0 in 2015. The ratio of women to men in tertiary education increased many folds from 0.28 women to every man in 2000 to 1.05 in 2015" (NRSDG, 2017). This shows that the target of gender parity was achieved in terms of gross and net enrolment rate at both primary and secondary education.

Attendance and drop-out

In the last few decades, school attendance rate has generally improved. The 2016 NDHS showed that the net attendance ratio (NAR) for primary school (age 6-12) is 80%, while for secondary school (age 11-15) is 67%. It has also been noted that girls' attendance in primary school (81%) is slightly higher than boys' attendance (79%), while the NAR for secondary school is slightly higher among boys (68%) than girls (66%). Based on the children's background, data shows that "both the primary school NAR and the secondary school NAR are lower in rural areas: 77% of rural children and 83% of urban children have attended primary school. Similarly, 61% of rural children and 71% of urban children have attended secondary school" (2016 NDHS).

The gross attendance ratio (GAR) for primary school is 113%, while for the secondary school is 88%. "A primary school GAR of more than 100% means that a significant number of primary school students are not of the official primary school age" (2016 NDHS).

As for Nepal's gender parity index (GPI), data shows that for NAR is 1.02 at the primary school, indicating that more girls are attending school than boys; however, the GPI for

NAR is 0.96 at the secondary school level, indicating that girls are dropping out (2016 NDHS). Several are the reasons for this, including child marriage, migration, poverty and a high rate of unemployment among educated people (Duwadi, 2018). Data on school drop-out shows improvement in general for both boys and girls, but still, gender discrimination and inequality is one of the reasons girls' drop-out rate is higher than boys' after primary school. Table C (see Appendix) reports data from the Nepal DHS 2016 showing the three attendance ratios (NAR, GAR, and GPI) according to background characteristics.

4.2 English in Nepal

Nepal is a multiethnic and multilingual country, and each different ethnic group speaks various languages (Bista, 2011). According to the National Population and Housing census 2011, there are 123 languages spoken as mother tongue (MT). However, Nepali is the only official language of Nepal: spoken as a MT by 44.6 percent of the total population, it is the language of business, education, mass media and public administration. It's followed by Maithili (11.7%), Bhojpuri (6.0%), Tharu (5.8%), Tamang (5.1%), Newar (3.2%), Bajjika (3.0%), Magar (3.0%), Doteli (3.0%), Urdu (2.6%). Most of these languages are not intercomprehensible; they cannot be mutually understood by each other's speakers and hence limit people's opportunities to grow, open their minds, and understand more of the world that surrounds them. Even when some of these languages and their dialects are partially intelligible, they are still not sufficient to understand complex and abstract discourse.

English is not an official language in Nepal. It is not a second language or an international language either. It has been used as a means of education in many private schools and university, but at the end of the day, English is considered a FL in Nepal (Bista, 2011).

4.2.1 History of English language teaching in Nepal

The English language, though it is not an indigenous language of Nepal and was imported for ideological reasons, occupies an impeccable and indispensable place in the socio-economic system, and therefore, the drive for its learning is paramount (Giri, 2010).

Before education became public in 1951, English language education was limited only to members of the royal family and élite members. In 1959, the first university of Nepal, Tribhuvan University, was established, giving high priority to the curriculum in English. However, when the NESP was implemented in 1971, it reduced the weight of the English language from primary school to the university. The Plan reduced credit hours of English and made it no longer a compulsory school subject, giving the option to choose between one of the UN languages, not necessarily English.

The majority of educators and students were in favors of continuing English in secondary level. Meanwhile, the government made its decision to switch over from English to Nepali as a medium of instruction in schools (Bista, 2011).

In 1981, Tribhuvan university implemented the English syllabi, “allotting a weighting of 200 marks instead of 100 to campus level English language courses, and other content courses in English” (Duwadi, 2018). Since the 1990s, the teaching and learning of the English language improved considerably, especially in higher levels of educations and private schools.

As English became a global language for international communication and socio-economic development, it is now taught as a FL in Nepal from Grade 1 to Grade 12 and is increasingly being used as a language of education, even if it is rarely used as a means of communication (Bista, 2011). The knowledge of English has become vital for educational, socio-economic, occupational and professional gains, as well as scientific and technological development. “It has become so crucial that an educated Nepali is virtually deprived of all sorts of opportunities if he or she does not know English. However, Nepal, like most developing countries, is struggling to meet the growing demand of quality English language education” (Giri, 2010).

In modern Nepal, English became available through various media, such as the internet, television, radio, and newspapers, as well as the opening of the country to tourism. However, the lack of quality English Language Teaching (ELT) techniques and resources (e.g., textbooks and trained teachers) impedes developing full proficiency and communicative competence in the language.

As the Ministry of Education explained in the School Sector Development Plan 2016 – 2023 (SSDP), developed by to continue the efforts made “to ensure equitable access to quality education for all” and to enable Nepal to achieve the SDGs, “many community school teachers do not have the requisite capabilities for teaching English as a subject, and very few schools, including even those with English as the medium of instruction, have teachers who can effectively teach in English” (Ministry of Education, 2016).

It took a long time for English to become accessible to Nepal: from the opening of public schools and the establishment of the first university in the 1950s, English teaching and learning has improved undeniably. There are still there several problems with ELT, from inadequate materials and classrooms to the need for better-trained teachers, but recent

developments (e.g., technological innovations and tighter international relations) continue to affect and extend the spread of the English language in Nepal.

4.2.2 The role of English as a medium of instruction

ELE in Nepal has become an important issue for educational policy-making. One key reason for not only including English as a school subject in formal education but also making it the medium of instruction is that the English language is the perfect tool for educational and socio-economic empowerment on a global scale. It has the power to expand learning opportunities and provide more possibilities for a better future, both locally and internationally.

English, in recent years, has become an indispensable part of life for the Nepalese people. In fact, it is presently used as an additional language, second language and even primary language in many socio-economic and educational domains in Nepal [...] Its current domination in all spheres of life makes the language indispensable and on a par with Nepali, currently the only official language for wider communication. As such, many advocate that English in Nepal deserves greater recognition than the term foreign language offers (Giri, 2014).

Today, private schools, as well as a number of public schools, use English as a medium of instruction (EMI), and generally, colleges and universities deliver education in English. Without any doubts, the global expansion of the English language influenced the Nepalese school system, fostering over the last decades “a highly significant development not only in the area of education but also for Nepali society as a whole” (Ranabhat & Chiluwal, 2018). With many private English-medium schools outperforming public schools in the School Level Certificate (SLC) examinations (national standardized exams), EMI became synonymous with high-quality education (Sah & Li, 2018). The 2010 Education Act legitimated both Nepali and English as the medium of instruction for both private and public schools (Government of Nepal, 2010), and since then, a larger number of public schools adopted EMI. However, not all schools which follow EMI deliver higher-quality education. The lack of recourses in terms of teachers’ preparation or teaching and learning materials translate into the impossibility to deliver the curriculum in English (Ministry of Education, 2016). “If children do not have access to quality

learning through a language that they understand, this learning is not likely to have the desired impact” (Earling, 2014). Therefore, the issue is that learners who received education in Nepali will not be prepared to face higher-education in English, while students who were taught in English do not reach the appropriate level of English proficiency and have, at the same time, huge difficulties performing in Nepali, since it was not of much importance in their curriculum (Shrestha, 2008).

Poor quality of English available in community (and probably some institutional) schools gives ‘low mobility’ English. The hoped-for benefits of good quality, high mobility competence in English are unlikely to arise and inequalities are likely to be reinforced (Ranabhat et al., 2018).

Sah and Li (2018) conducted a study on this very topic, analyzing EMI as a linguistic capital in an under-resourced public school in Katmandu, showing that, “despite the school’s claim of offering EMI education, Nepali was the actual language of instruction in the school due to teachers’ lack of proficiency in English and the school’s inadequate resources and preparedness for a shift to EMI. As a result, the students developed neither the content knowledge nor English language skills” (Sah & Li, 2018). EMI contributed to low proficiency in both English and Nepali as well as a crisis in content learning, with the school being the only beneficiary, assisting its sustainability and saving its teachers’ employment.

Besides lack of resources, teacher-training, and poor quality issues, Dawadi (2018) showed how the English SLC examination in Nepal also has a negative impact on students’ performance. SLC is a national examination took at the end of secondary education to certify the school level achievement of students, acting as “a gateway to higher education, a measure of the quality of education and a basic license for official employment” (Dawadi, 2018). However, even if the Nepalese government made numerous efforts to show the positive function and effect of SLC, this type of examination format has been “criticized for being an unfair one and irrelevant to both further studies and employment” (Shrestha, 2018). Investigating the washback effects of the English SLC, Dawadi (2018) conducted a study examining teachers’ perceptions and attitudes and towards the test in six different districts across Nepal. The results showed that the examination impacts both what students learn and teachers’ instructional methods.

It is contended that tests also affect teaching content and methodology with teachers designing their teaching materials and content around tests, a process called curriculum alignment [...] The SLC English examination focuses primarily on candidates' reading and writing skills rather than on more communicative competence models. The examination is divided into two parts: a written test and a speaking test [...] The test motivates students to develop their reading and writing skills, but not listening and speaking skills [...] Although the curriculum urges teachers to use communicative and integrated language skills, they just follow a traditional teaching approach, narrowing down the curriculum to mirror test contents (Dawadi, 2018)

In 2015, in order to provide teachers better skills to educate students and teach in the classrooms, the British Council Nepal and the National Centre for Educational Development (NCED) developed and implemented the National Initiative to Improve Teaching in English (NIITE), a program aimed at “improving the classroom performance of teachers of English and other subjects in EMI settings in government schools” (British Council, 2018c). NIITE, a three years project started in January 2015, provided adequate training to 7000 teachers from all 75 districts of Nepal, helping them developing their teaching skills and promoting a quality EMI in both private and community schools.

Before NIITE, a previous British Council project called English for Teaching: Teaching for English (ETTE+), which run from 2008 to 2011, supported the development of communicative English language teaching in Nepalese primary schools helping English teachers improving their language and teaching skills (British Council, 2018). In its first phase, ETTE+ “trained over 1000 teachers in 13 districts and over 50 trainers and mentors throughout Nepal. In its second phase, the impact extended beyond 3,000 teachers. ETTE+ was particularly designed for teachers who lived in far-flung areas, and who had not benefited from training or development opportunities. ETTE+ helped school teachers improve their performance in the classroom by enhancing their access to materials, methods and opportunities for their professional training and development” (British Council, 2018b).

Beside teachers' methods and preparation, Dawadi (2018) found negative effects also on students' motivation: since their future depends on the results of the examination, students' learning methods and preparation will mainly be aimed at passing the test,

memorizing sample answers, acquiring limited English language skills and being unprepared for real world interactions and employment opportunities using English.

Seel et al. (2015) described the current linguistic scenario as follows:

The transition of many schools to EMI seems to have been largely as a response to parent's demands and the need to keep enrolment numbers high. The lack of books and materials, or even of teachers who speak English, does not seem to have cautioned schools away from embarking on the change. In reality, most 'English medium' schools would seem to be using Nepali quite extensively alongside English, but without the benefits of a planned approach to bilingual teaching. Training and resourcing for English falls vastly short of what is required, even to achieve effective teaching of English as a subject (Seel et al., 2015).

Proficiency in English is a skill students need to develop to be able to access further education, training, and employment. Brown (2018) explained that “there is some evidence to suggest that English can offer a high return on investment especially in more highly skilled work in the specific and small sectors mentioned, but there is much less evidence to support the benefits it brings to people working in low-skilled work in the much larger informal sectors. This may be why English continues to be such a political and aspirational language rather than one that the majority of students in low- and middle-income countries have an actual, immediate need for” (Brown, 2018).

For these reasons, the 2016 SSDP encouraged schools that use EMI to return to providing English as a subject only:

Children will be assisted to acquire Nepali if it is not their mother tongue so that they can fully engage in the national education system. English is to be added as a second or third language to prepare students to use an international language for their future social and economic advancement (Ministry of Education, 2016).

Due to the fact that English is the language of economics, business, education, media, and international relations, its teaching and learning have become vital to the development of both the individual and the society. “In commercial domains, English has become the core of all economic success. Whether it is a simple housemaid's work or tourist guide's,

or whether it is teaching in a private school or establishing a business, English is a prerequisite without which success is only an illusion” (Giri, 2015).

As the medium of instruction is not an information recorded by the Education Management Information System, “it is difficult to establish just how many community schools in Nepal are making the change to EMI, but the numbers are clearly significant and there is a growing feeling that adopting EMI is strongly favoured by parents” (Hayes, 2018). However, the problems linked to education in English have further broadened differences between higher and lower socio-economic groups. The quality of ELE one receives depends on how much people are able to pay for it. Socio-economic status determines access to quality education: those who have higher incomes and are better educated can afford to send their children to good EMI schools, while those with less income and lower social rank if they want their children to receive education in English, have to send them to cheaper, lower-quality EMI schools. Ranabhat et al. (2018) argued and showed that “the poor quality of English available in public schools gives ‘low mobility’ English. The hoped-for benefits of good quality, high mobility competence in English are unlikely to arise and inequalities are likely to be reinforced” (Ranabhat et al., 2018).

4.3 Education and empowerment initiatives for Nepalese girls and women

In the last few decades, Nepal has made some impressive progress regarding girls' access to education and women's empowerment. Both the government and nongovernmental sector invested in and developed strategic partnerships to provide equitable access to education, emphasizing girls' empowerment: the government prioritized girls' education in its policies and programs, while many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) run programs for girls' education and empowerment (Gautam, 2016). From focusing on women's and girls' literacy and empowerment to tackling economic, cultural, and political issues that represent barriers to gender equality, some of the most relevant NGOs' programs working in Nepal to advance women's rights are:

- Room to Read's literacy and girls' education programs focused on girls' education and empowerment;
- Sisters for Sisters' education and gender equality program;
- CARE Nepal's women's and girls' empowerment programs that focus on economic, socio-political, and cultural issues;
- Hands in Outreach's sponsorship program focused on providing education to poor, inner-city girls;
- Educate the Children Nepal's women's literacy and empowerment in *dalit* and *janajati* communities programs;
- Chhori Nepal's education and entrepreneurship's programs that enhance women's employment prospects.
- Save The Children's programs for accessible education, child protection and health;
- Rural Education and Environment Development Center's gender inclusion, quality education, and environment and climate change programs in the Himalayan region;
- Equal Access's women's and girls' empowerment programs;
- The Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) Nepal's program for inclusive education, social innovation, and post-disaster recovery.

Other organizations and international funds that have included girls' and women's educational rights in their development agenda include UNICEF, UNESCO, U.S. Agency for International Development, Global Partnership for Education, The Asia Foundation, Action Aid, National Democratic Institute, International Alert, Center for Reproductive Rights (Gautam, 2016)

4.3.1 Focus on Language Education: the EDGE Project

As education is the key to empower women, language education can be the matrix of the actualisation of that empowerment on a global scale. Denying equal opportunities in language learning to women is not only denying them the chance to be able to speak and communicate in a practical manner in a language different from their own, but it also means denying them the possibility to acquire the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives. Granting women and girls the opportunity to learn one or more languages different from their L1 can expand learning opportunities and provide them more possibilities for a better future.

English became a necessary skill young Nepalese women and men need to access employment and higher-level educational opportunities. However, gender differences play a huge role in decreasing women's and girls' opportunities to learn the language. To this end, the British Council launched in 2012 the **English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE)**, a project aimed to improve the English level of teenage girls in socio-economically marginalized communities in Nepal, as well as Bangladesh and India. In doing so, girls would develop essential and useful skills, improve their life prospects and increase their educational, social and economic opportunities.

The programme focuses on enhancing participants' English proficiency, digital skills and awareness of social issues. In addition, the programme aims to improve the leadership skills of a smaller group of peer leaders drawn from the same communities of adolescent girls.

Our vision is to enable adolescent girls from marginalised communities to make more informed and independent life choices, as is their right, in order to contribute fully to the family, the economy and society (The British Council, 2016b).

EDGE is a network of non-formal, community-based, peer-led clubs for adolescent girls that provides training and skills development for young girls in English language and ICT, using digital media (British Council, 2016). Not only is there an education gap between boys and girls, but there is also a digital gender gap: girls have much less access to ICTs and digital learning than boys do. If girls improve their language and digital skills, as well as they become more aware of their rights and gain the confidence they need to insist on them, they can use their knowledge, and their language and digital skills, to access and create new opportunities for themselves. This will enable them to make more informed and independent life decisions and to give a significant contribution to their families, “which is likely, as their contributions become more visible and acknowledge by communities over time, to help enhance girls’ status and support the development of more equitable society” (British Council, 2016b). This was the theory behind the launch of the first pilot project for the EDGE program.

The school system is not sufficiently resourced nor equipped in Nepal, and factors like gender and caste discrimination can deeply affect the education children and teenagers receive. English language learning and teaching, along with many other subjects, are limited by lack of resources, teacher-training, and poor quality issues.

The English language is a crucial instrument for the appropriate use of ICT, as English is the predominant language of the Internet. Without English language skills, it becomes very difficult to use ICT materials. Vice versa, ICT can be very useful in English learning and teaching. The EDGE project was set up to enable girls to have that access they are sometimes denied, i.e., access to ICT and/or access to English, and to do so in a safe space, in a non-formal environment within their community. Therefore, English and ICT clubs for girls were created. “These clubs have buy-in from parents and communities, are ‘safe’ social spaces and effective in reducing barriers to access and participation (which include social norms and gender roles)” (British Council, 2015).

What follows is an evaluation of the EDGE project to date and a discussion of its future actions.

Who was involved?

From what we can see, the primary target group of the project is adolescent girls between 14 – 19, who are either currently out-of-school or living in socio-economically marginalized communities. The program does not use a traditional teacher training model but is based on a *peer leader model*, involving some participants to be trained as peer

leaders, who then lead sessions. Through this leader model, they enable girls to share and learn from each other, while also taking a leadership role and a teaching role.

They will be trained on basic computer skills (safely turning on and off a computer, navigation, use of mouse, keyboard and headphones), technical know-how on the use of designed content and other software necessary to deliver training to the girl students. Additionally, training on the use of flashcards, delivering training and conducting 'reflection and feedback' sessions for girl students will form an integral part of peer leaders' training programmes. Since these clubs are run by peer leaders themselves, they will also be taught management and administrative skills (British Council, 2015)

How was the project conducted?

The materials for the peer-lead clubs are portable devices (phones, tablets and laptops) preloaded with British Council digital English resources, supplemented by U.S. Embassy Kathmandu ELL materials. Sessions of English and ICT last between one and three hours and vary from learning computer skills, to role-plays, quizzes, reading and activities on English vocabulary and grammar. “The girl students are also provided with self-study materials such as storybooks, dictionaries, audio materials on micro-SD cards and access to online content for those who have feature phones” (British Council, 2015).

The EDGE program trains young girls to be *peer group leaders* so that they can lead these English and ICT after-school clubs within their communities. In these clubs, girls can meet twice a week, or more frequently, and discuss social issues, improve their English proficiency and learn new digital skills, as well as critical thinking and problem solving (British Council, 2018a).

In contexts where learners speak only when called on to do so, peer-led clubs ensure voluntary participation and freedom of expression while enabling members to undertake learning at their own pace in an autonomous environment [...] There is also engagement at community level with parents, community leaders and members and religious leaders (British Council, 2018a).

The Impact of the project

EDGE monitoring processes allow to measure and evaluate progress through assessments, as well as midline and endline studies. Over 14,000 girls have participated and benefited from the program (British Council, 2018a). A recent review study showed that girls who participate to the sessions could then use their agency to improve their lives, reporting examples of “girls being able to return to school, delay an early marriage or seek paid employment whilst staying in school as a result of the new skills they have gained. 1,200 peer leaders trained in Nepal, Bangladesh and India have delivered 531 clubs within their communities to 12,990 marginalized girls around the three countries” (British Council, 2018a).

The impact of the project spans from girls’ actual higher proficiency in English and ICT to an increase in women’s employment rate, from a boost in self-confidence and self-reliance to a lower rate of early marriage and better, higher-paying jobs. The peer-lead clubs also contribute to the creation of networks that not only contribute to promote girls’ education but also to share awareness about gender equity and discrimination.

The needs analysis for EDGE showed that EDGE contributes to students completing the formal education cycle, which has positive societal impacts, including strengthening participants’ likelihood of finding formal employment and raising the age of marriage. These impacts are positively linked with two of the empowerment outcome areas: increasing access to opportunities and resources and contributing to changing social norms (British Council, 2017)

Future of the project

After a first pilot project in 2015-16 partnered with the US Embassy in Kathmandu and Equal Access Nepal for the initial training for Peer Group Leaders, in 2018 British Council Nepal and VSO Nepal have signed a 4-year contract “to implement the EDGE program as part of VSO’s wider Sisters for Sisters’ Education project. The project will work in 48 schools across four districts targeting 17220 adolescent girls and will use the regional EDGE club model and resources with some local adaptations to enhance participants’ English proficiency, digital skills and social / life skills” (British Council, 2018d).

Through the learning of the English language and digital skills, girls not only gain the skills needed to enter the labor market, they also gain confidence. ICT fairs around the country provide EDGE girls the opportunity “to demonstrate their learning, often to crowds of more than 1,000 people” (British Council, 2018a).

The EDGE program is a project that has the power to make significant changes in people’s lives, improving and creating new opportunities for girls from socio-economically marginalized communities. In today’s world, English and ITC are crucial skills for the development of girls in Nepal; the lack of such skills can represent a significant barrier for women, denying access to better jobs, and holding them back from participating and taking a leadership role in the development of a better society.

Nepal is still a country filled with taboos and gender discrimination. However, evidence of the importance of granting a fair and qualitative English and digital education to young girls can be seen in the very active role that women play in local and national development once they are granted that education. The EDGE project is an incredibly valuable initiative that can help girls from all across Nepal develop these skills and provide them the opportunity to improve their life.

* * *

Nepal is still characterized by a wide gender disparity in the education system and still has a long way ahead before ending education inequalities. From son preference and child marriage to the unfair social tradition of *chhaupadi*, many are the reasons that affect girls’ educational opportunities, limiting attendance and pushing them to drop out of school.

As the English language is a tool for empowerment on a global scale, its knowledge has become vital for educational, socio-economic, occupational and professional gains, as well as scientific and technological development. To young Nepalese women, English has become a necessary skill needed to access employment and higher-level of educational opportunities, a new way to improve their future.

There are still several problems with ELT in Nepal, from inadequate materials and classrooms to the need for better-trained teachers, but recent developments (e.g., technological innovations and tighter international relations) continue to affect and extend the spread of the English language in Nepal. However, like in every other aspect

of life, gender differences play a huge role in decreasing women's and girls' opportunities to learn the language.

As both the Nepalese government and many NGOs are interested in providing girls the best means to achieve literacy and empowerment, many are the programs that help overcome the barriers of gender equality. The British Council initiative, English and Digital for Girls' Education (EDGE), is the perfect example of a program that aims to improve teenage girls' English level while also helping them develop important and useful skills to improve their life prospects and increase their future possibilities. Programs like EDGE have the power to improve and create new and incredible opportunities for women and girls.

The importance of English as a global language in today's society is undeniable. Lack of English skills can represent a significant barrier for women, denying access to better jobs, and holding them back from participating and taking a leadership role in the development of a better society. Improving women's and girls' education, giving them the tools to participate in society as active leaders and agents of change, does not mean improving only their life and empowering only individuals. Empowering women means empowering the whole world.

Conclusion and Way Forward

The general aim of this thesis was to illustrate how theories of language learning relate to real-life situations and to show how second/foreign language education can be a tool for empowering women.

Educated women not only help building stronger economies, but also improve the quality of life for their families and communities, and can participate in the national development process for a better society. Not only women are essential at a local level, but at a global level too; the best way women can contribute to an overall better society it's through language. A woman who's educated can contribute to the development of her own society, but a woman who knows two, three or more languages, can leave a mark on the entire world. More languages women know, more doors are open for them.

This thesis is based on the fact that learning a foreign language allows women to speak and communicate in a practical manner in a language different from their own, while also acquiring the ability and knowledge needed to direct their own lives. It can also be a vital tool for women's economic empowerment. In particular, as previously mentioned, women who can understand and speak more than one language can have more employment opportunities and, most of all, access to good quality jobs, advanced levels of study or even get the chance to move to another country.

Interesting observations emerged regarding the gatekeeping nature of language. Language can act as a gate to bring people together and to keep them apart (Moore, 2007). Controlling and limiting access to second/foreign language education, based on race-ethnicity, class, culture and gender differences, creates barriers, inequality in power and contributes to arrest development for families and societies. However, granting a quality and equal language education to all can indeed improve people's lives, providing them access to better jobs or amplifying their mobility, as well as having substantial positive effects on a global scale.

Among the countless languages used around the world, proficiency in an international language such as English can open up countless doors. English as an international language (EIL) can give women, who are struggling to emerge or assert their rights, the opportunity to make their voice heard, to improve their quality and access to education as well as increasing their employment opportunities and quality of life.

English language skills are highly rewarded in the labour market. Returns to English language skills are heterogeneous and, like education in general, they accrue along with other socioeconomic variables such as gender, ethnicity, class and location (Earling, 2014).

Investing in English language education will improve both men's and women's possibilities to fulfill their desires and achieve a certain level of success in life. This is why English language learning initiatives are recognized as an investment to enhance personal skills and economic development by governments in their education programs (Earling, 2014). Beside governments emphasizing their language policies, the nongovernment sector also invests in providing equitable access to language education, with the British Council being one of the main ones. The importance of English as a global language in today's society led policy makers and NGOs implementers to underline the power of English skills to help expanding people's possibilities and developing employability skills.

In societies such as Nepal's, where gender discrimination is a major problem and girls' education often takes a back seat, women who learned language-communication skills in order to participate in marketing and decision-making processes can prove their worth to their society, helping eradicate wrong bias and stereotypes about the role of women and girls. They are not just daughters, mothers or wives; they are individuals with the same potential and capacities of men, and they should be granted the same opportunities in every level.

Based on the review of the available literature on the topic, it is impossible to deny that knowing more than one language can help empower women from a social and economic point of view. However, there is a need for more data on the relationship between language education and women's empowerment. The more data on how English can benefit women's and girls' possibilities for a better future, the better educational programs and policies will be designed.

“If English is to be taught, we should ensure that it is taught in a way that allows people to access more information and make more informed choices about their employment and education and that it is providing people with the skills that they can and want to use to enrich their lives” (Earling, 2014).

As for recommendations and actions, in order to promote and implement sustainable and innovative education initiatives, policy makers should consider essential:

- ❖ focusing on a higher quality and gender sensitive education;
- ❖ improving school infrastructures through clean and healthy sanitation facilities;
- ❖ training and recruiting more female teachers;
- ❖ and providing education through a medium of instruction that students will easily understand.

Since this discussion on how language education can empower women is not based on empirical data, one of the future directions to take is developing new methodologies that include both gender issues and L2 acquisition in order to conduct future studies that will contribute to implement and provide better access, quality and equality of education.

Pushing for women to have a better language education is pushing for women's empowerment. Providing a safe space and the opportunity to learn one or more languages can allow women to grow and thrive.

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Appendix

Table 1 – Female educational attainment

Background characteristic	No education	Some primary	Completed primary ¹	Some secondary	Completed secondary ²	More than secondary	Total	Number	Median years completed
Age									
6-9	23.9	74.9	0.9	0.3	0.0	0.0	100.0	2,090	0.5
10-14	3.7	41.3	16.5	38.1	0.4	0.1	100.0	2,858	4.3
15-19	5.8	7.2	5.7	48.6	18.2	14.5	100.0	2,625	8.1
20-24	14.0	9.2	6.7	30.1	11.7	28.3	100.0	2,375	8.3
25-29	27.1	11.7	7.5	20.3	9.1	24.2	100.0	2,108	6.1
30-34	37.4	15.1	7.7	19.9	7.6	12.3	100.0	1,832	3.5
35-39	53.5	12.3	5.7	16.4	5.7	6.4	100.0	1,637	0.0
40-44	61.9	10.8	4.7	12.8	4.7	4.9	100.0	1,380	0.0
45-49	73.0	10.2	2.6	6.9	3.4	4.0	100.0	1,088	0.0
50-54	83.6	7.6	1.7	4.4	1.9	0.8	100.0	1,205	0.0
55-59	89.8	4.0	2.0	2.6	0.5	1.1	100.0	899	0.0
60-64	91.2	4.6	0.7	1.1	0.9	1.4	100.0	828	0.0
65+	95.8	2.4	0.4	0.9	0.1	0.4	100.0	1,556	0.0
Residence									
Urban	35.2	18.1	5.8	21.3	7.4	12.2	100.0	13,517	3.3
Rural	46.6	21.2	6.1	18.1	3.7	4.3	100.0	8,965	0.3
Ecological zone									
Mountain	44.3	20.1	5.6	19.3	3.7	7.0	100.0	1,462	0.8
Hill	34.8	18.0	6.0	22.3	7.0	11.9	100.0	9,628	3.4
Terai	43.3	20.3	5.9	18.2	5.3	7.0	100.0	11,392	1.1
Development region									
Eastern	39.5	18.9	6.2	20.7	7.0	7.7	100.0	5,142	2.2
Central	42.1	18.6	5.5	17.0	5.6	11.3	100.0	7,856	1.5
Western	35.1	19.4	6.2	22.9	6.4	10.0	100.0	4,507	3.1
Mid-western	39.1	21.8	6.4	21.9	5.0	5.9	100.0	2,901	1.9
Far-western	42.5	19.5	5.7	21.2	4.5	6.6	100.0	2,076	1.4
Province									
Province 1	35.7	18.3	6.8	22.8	7.4	9.0	100.0	3,839	3.2
Province 2	52.9	21.3	5.4	13.4	3.7	3.3	100.0	4,723	0.0
Province 3	33.0	16.4	5.3	20.0	7.7	17.7	100.0	4,435	4.1
Province 4	34.5	16.3	6.6	24.7	6.8	11.1	100.0	2,173	3.8
Province 5	36.7	22.1	6.3	21.6	5.7	7.6	100.0	3,924	2.5
Province 6	40.2	21.4	5.8	21.4	4.7	6.4	100.0	1,311	1.5
Province 7	42.5	19.5	5.7	21.2	4.5	6.6	100.0	2,076	1.4
Wealth quintile									
Lowest	47.8	23.9	6.3	17.6	2.3	2.2	100.0	4,432	0.0
Second	45.5	19.8	6.0	19.6	4.0	5.0	100.0	4,571	0.6
Middle	45.3	21.4	5.8	18.6	4.6	4.3	100.0	4,513	0.5
Fourth	37.8	17.4	6.4	21.6	7.6	9.2	100.0	4,511	2.9
Highest	22.1	14.0	5.2	22.7	11.2	24.8	100.0	4,455	7.1
Total	39.7	19.3	5.9	20.0	5.9	9.1	100.0	22,482	2.1

¹ Completed grade 5 at the primary level

² Completed grade 10 at the secondary level

Source: 2016 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey

Table 2 – Male educational attainment

Background characteristic	No education	Some primary	Completed primary ¹	Some secondary	Completed secondary ²	More than secondary	Don't know	Total	Number	Median years completed
Age										
6-9	28.2	71.0	0.7	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	100.0	2,071	0.3
10-14	3.8	41.8	17.0	37.3	0.2	0.0	0.0	100.0	2,916	4.3
15-19	1.7	6.2	5.8	52.3	18.8	15.2	0.0	100.0	2,134	8.2
20-24	4.2	9.4	5.9	28.8	15.5	36.2	0.0	100.0	1,451	9.1
25-29	7.4	10.8	6.0	27.6	13.4	34.6	0.3	100.0	1,174	8.8
30-34	11.3	14.3	8.7	30.5	12.2	22.8	0.2	100.0	1,196	7.6
35-39	14.2	17.4	7.6	30.6	12.9	16.7	0.5	100.0	1,145	7.1
40-44	20.9	14.3	8.8	25.6	12.7	17.3	0.4	100.0	1,070	6.4
45-49	23.5	18.3	7.3	24.1	10.6	15.8	0.4	100.0	1,015	5.2
50-54	32.7	20.9	5.6	18.7	9.6	12.1	0.4	100.0	1,010	3.2
55-59	42.6	19.4	8.5	15.1	6.4	7.9	0.0	100.0	869	1.7
60-64	49.2	19.9	7.4	11.0	6.2	6.2	0.2	100.0	691	0.0
65+	68.1	13.6	4.8	7.0	2.5	3.8	0.2	100.0	1,612	0.0
Residence										
Urban	16.9	22.4	7.5	26.4	10.0	16.6	0.2	100.0	11,264	5.6
Rural	26.3	28.3	7.9	24.2	6.2	6.9	0.1	100.0	7,091	3.3
Ecological zone										
Mountain	21.9	28.0	8.6	24.0	7.1	10.2	0.1	100.0	1,188	4.0
Hill	16.0	23.8	7.6	27.3	9.1	15.9	0.3	100.0	7,914	5.4
Terai	24.3	25.0	7.6	24.2	8.2	10.6	0.1	100.0	9,254	4.1
Development region										
Eastern	21.4	23.3	7.5	27.2	9.2	11.4	0.1	100.0	4,230	4.7
Central	21.9	23.0	7.1	22.2	9.3	16.2	0.3	100.0	6,767	4.7
Western	18.0	24.6	8.0	27.9	9.1	12.4	0.1	100.0	3,559	4.9
Mid-western	20.5	30.1	9.0	27.0	5.4	7.9	0.1	100.0	2,258	3.9
Far-western	18.4	28.1	8.1	28.2	6.6	10.6	0.1	100.0	1,541	4.4
Province										
Province 1	19.2	23.2	8.0	28.6	9.1	11.8	0.1	100.0	3,222	5.0
Province 2	30.6	25.0	6.8	21.4	7.7	8.3	0.1	100.0	3,851	2.9
Province 3	15.0	21.2	7.0	23.1	10.9	22.4	0.5	100.0	3,924	6.4
Province 4	17.2	23.0	8.2	28.5	9.4	13.5	0.1	100.0	1,667	5.3
Province 5	19.9	27.7	8.3	27.5	7.2	9.4	0.1	100.0	3,108	4.3
Province 6	19.2	29.8	8.8	26.3	6.2	9.6	0.0	100.0	1,041	4.1
Province 7	18.4	28.1	8.1	28.2	6.6	10.6	0.1	100.0	1,541	4.4
Wealth quintile										
Lowest	28.5	35.3	8.6	21.6	3.1	2.8	0.0	100.0	3,492	2.2
Second	26.3	28.6	8.4	25.6	5.8	5.3	0.0	100.0	3,546	3.3
Middle	26.5	25.0	8.7	26.2	7.2	6.4	0.1	100.0	3,596	3.8
Fourth	16.4	21.5	8.1	29.3	11.6	13.0	0.2	100.0	3,720	5.7
Highest	7.1	14.7	4.9	24.8	14.0	34.0	0.5	100.0	4,001	8.8
Total	20.6	24.7	7.7	25.5	8.5	12.9	0.2	100.0	18,355	4.6

¹ Completed grade 5 at the primary level

² Completed grade 10 at the secondary level

Source: 2016 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey

Table 3 – School attendance ratios (NAR, GAR, and GPI)

Background characteristic	Net attendance ratio ¹				Gross attendance ratio ²			
	Male	Female	Total	Gender parity index ³	Male	Female	Total	Gender parity index ³
PRIMARY SCHOOL								
Residence								
Urban	82.3	83.3	82.8	1.01	112.8	113.7	113.3	1.01
Rural	75.9	78.3	77.1	1.03	111.1	114.4	112.7	1.03
Ecological zone								
Mountain	84.6	86.4	85.5	1.02	115.8	124.7	120.0	1.08
Hill	84.6	87.0	85.8	1.03	114.8	118.0	116.4	1.03
Terai	75.0	76.2	75.6	1.02	109.6	110.0	109.8	1.00
Development region								
Eastern	80.3	82.3	81.3	1.02	108.5	117.6	112.8	1.08
Central	73.4	74.3	73.8	1.01	105.1	107.6	106.3	1.02
Western	81.4	84.4	82.9	1.04	116.8	116.8	116.8	1.00
Mid-western	86.4	86.7	86.5	1.00	120.7	121.8	121.3	1.01
Far-western	83.4	84.8	84.1	1.02	121.2	111.0	115.7	0.92
Province								
Province 1	82.2	82.2	82.2	1.00	109.1	113.5	111.2	1.04
Province 2	66.8	68.4	67.6	1.02	100.9	106.4	103.6	1.05
Province 3	85.6	88.4	87.0	1.03	113.2	118.1	115.5	1.04
Province 4	84.2	86.6	85.4	1.03	111.7	110.3	111.0	0.99
Province 5	82.9	84.1	83.5	1.01	124.1	121.1	122.6	0.98
Province 6	84.9	87.8	86.3	1.03	113.0	123.3	118.0	1.09
Province 7	83.4	84.8	84.1	1.02	121.2	111.0	115.7	0.92
Wealth quintile								
Lowest	86.3	83.9	85.0	0.97	122.8	122.2	122.5	1.00
Second	75.5	78.4	76.9	1.04	103.8	108.4	106.1	1.04
Middle	73.6	76.8	75.2	1.04	108.0	113.1	110.5	1.05
Fourth	76.6	81.4	79.0	1.06	111.5	115.7	113.6	1.04
Highest	85.4	85.5	85.4	1.00	112.4	107.1	109.7	0.95
Total	79.4	81.0	80.2	1.02	112.0	114.0	113.0	1.02
SECONDARY SCHOOL								
Residence								
Urban	71.5	71.0	71.3	0.99	92.1	92.4	92.2	1.00
Rural	62.6	58.5	60.5	0.93	84.3	78.9	81.5	0.94
Ecological zone								
Mountain	72.0	71.3	71.7	0.99	91.3	94.8	93.1	1.04
Hill	77.9	77.7	77.8	1.00	103.3	101.0	102.2	0.98
Terai	59.2	54.8	57.0	0.93	76.8	73.4	75.1	0.96
Development region								
Eastern	71.8	65.5	68.6	0.91	93.9	88.3	91.0	0.94
Central	61.6	57.6	59.6	0.93	81.6	72.5	76.9	0.89
Western	71.9	72.0	71.9	1.00	92.4	91.3	91.9	0.99
Mid-western	68.7	69.4	69.0	1.01	89.3	96.6	93.1	1.08
Far-western	71.0	75.4	73.1	1.06	94.3	106.5	100.2	1.13
Province								
Province 1	75.3	70.3	72.8	0.93	94.7	95.8	95.2	1.01
Province 2	48.6	41.7	44.9	0.86	66.6	55.6	60.8	0.83
Province 3	77.0	77.4	77.2	1.01	103.1	93.7	98.3	0.91
Province 4	80.9	81.8	81.3	1.01	106.7	107.1	106.9	1.00
Province 5	64.4	64.4	64.4	1.00	80.4	84.1	82.2	1.05
Province 6	73.8	73.3	73.5	0.99	100.2	100.5	100.3	1.00
Province 7	71.0	75.4	73.1	1.06	94.3	106.5	100.2	1.13

Background characteristic	Net attendance ratio ¹				Gross attendance ratio ²			
	Male	Female	Total	Gender Parity Index ³	Male	Female	Total	Gender Parity Index ³
Wealth quintile								
Lowest	66.9	64.3	65.6	0.96	85.2	88.7	87.0	1.04
Second	66.2	64.0	65.1	0.97	87.4	87.9	87.7	1.01
Middle	62.1	56.6	59.3	0.91	81.4	75.5	78.4	0.93
Fourth	66.9	67.3	67.1	1.01	93.2	84.7	88.9	0.91
Highest	78.8	79.0	78.9	1.00	99.4	97.4	98.4	0.98
Total	67.9	65.5	66.7	0.96	89.0	86.5	87.7	0.97

¹ The NAR for primary school is the percentage of the primary school-age (6-10 years) population that is attending primary school. The NAR for secondary school is the percentage of the secondary school-age (11-15 years) population that is attending secondary school. By definition, the NAR cannot exceed 100%.

² The GAR for primary school is the total number of primary school students, expressed as a percentage of the official primary school-age population. The GAR for secondary school is the total number of secondary school students, expressed as a percentage of the official secondary school-age population. If there are significant numbers of overage and underage students at a given level of schooling, the GAR can exceed 100%.

³ The gender parity index for primary school is the ratio of the primary school NAR (GAR) for females to the NAR (GAR) for males. The gender parity index for secondary school is the ratio of the secondary school NAR (GAR) for females to the NAR (GAR) for males.

Source: 2016 Nepal Demographic and Health Survey