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### Promoting Gender Equality in Education in Vietnam Currently

Luu Thi Duyen

University of Labor and Social Affairs, Viet Nam

Corresponding Author: **Luu Thi Duyen**

#### Abstract

Investing in people is investing in educational development, improving the quality of human resources, and is also investing in the future. The adoption of the Gender Equality Law with provisions related to gender equality in the field of education has shown new steps in Vietnam's awareness and determination to implement the millennium development

goals. However, in reality, in the field of education there still exist aspects that reflect gender inequality. This article analyzes the dimensions of gender inequality in education to comprehensively identify recommendations to promote gender equality in the field of education in Vietnam today.

**Keywords:** Inequality, Gender Inequality, Education, Gender Equality in Education

#### 1. Introduction

Vietnam's education today has had many significant innovations, serving as the foundation for developing the country's human resources. In the field of education, the issue of gender equality has even deeper significance. If we assume that boys and girls are equally naturally competent and that more capable children receive more education and training, then child bias means that boys with lower potential than girls get more education. Thus, the quality of human resources in the economy will be lower than can be achieved and limit the potential for economic growth. Gender equality in education has a positive impact on the quality of human resources in the future.

#### 2. Theoretical basis

*Education:* There are many different understandings of education and each concept reflects one or several certain aspects depending on the research purpose. When discussing the meaning of this term, sociologists have synthesized the knowledge of the sciences and make the argument that, although there exists many different interpretations, expressions, and uses of words, in the end, *education is the transmission of knowledge, experience accumulates from one person to another, from generation to generation, but at the same time it is also the process of acquiring new knowledge. In this sense, education is both active and passive.* The activeness of education is expressed through the process of transferring knowledge and its passivity is expressed through the process of absorbing transferred knowledge. The forms of formal education in the education system in Vietnam today are preschool education, primary education, secondary education, university education, special education and vocational education.

The term "Gender" is defined in many different ways. In a narrow sense, some dictionaries define this term as synonymous with gender or the classification of men, women or neuter. This understanding is not complete, because "gender" is a concept that refers to the biological characteristics of men and women, and refers to common differences between men and women that are often determined from birth. For example, only women can give birth, only men have sperm... "Gender" only refers to the physical characteristics of the body.

The Law on Gender Equality defines "*Gender refers to the characteristics and roles of men and women in all social relationships.*"<sup>1</sup> More specifically, Gender refers to learned differences and social relationships between men and women that can change over time and have great variations across cultures.

<sup>1</sup> Gender equality law, Hanoi National Political Publishing House, 2007

Gender equality is the goal of many countries around the world. In recent decades, gender equality has come into greater focus in Viet Nam. Article 4 of the Law on Gender Equality defines Vietnam's gender equality goal as "eliminating gender discrimination, creating opportunities for men and women in socio-economic development and human resource development, towards substantive gender equality for men and women in all fields of social life"

Article 5 of the Law on Gender Equality stipulates: "*Gender equality means that men and women have equal positions and roles, are given conditions and opportunities to promote their capacities for the development of the community and family and equally enjoy the fruits of that development.*" Gender equality is the recognition, respect and promotion of equal male and female rights in all areas of social and family life.

Inequality is the unfair, unequal opportunity or benefits for different individuals in a social group or in multiple social groups. *Gender inequality is discrimination against men and women in terms of status, conditions and opportunities disadvantageous for men and women in the realization of human rights, contributing to and enjoying from the development of the family and the country.* In other words, gender inequality is actions, perceptions, prejudices that lead to gender equality being violated.

Educational inequality is mainly the inequity in educational opportunities and the ability to graduate from all levels of education for women compared to men. Because education has many different levels, gender inequality in education can be considered at the level of general education and

vocational training.

### 3. Research Methods

The article is analyzed on the basis of experimental data, an overview assessment survey on the situation of gender equality in Vietnam in 2021 and analysis of secondary data of the General Statistics Office on the population living standards survey in 2020. These are quantitative results that ensure reliability and objectivity in research. The article explores the current situation of gender inequality in the education sector through some basic indicators: (i) the proportion of the population aged 15 and above who is literate by gender; (ii) attendance rates broken down by level of education and gender; (iii) the structure of the population aged 15 years or older according to the highest degree; (iv) the ratio of teachers and lecturers by gender, (v) the average education expenditure per person attending school.

### 4. Current status of gender equality in education in Vietnam

Using a number of statistical indicators to analyze gender inequality in education still exists and is increasingly manifesting in various forms. In addition to the implementation of the policy of universal primary education, the literacy rate of Vietnam's population continues to increase over the years, the education level of the population is also being improved. The literacy rate of the population aged 15 and above in Vietnam from 2017 – 2021 is shown in graph 1.

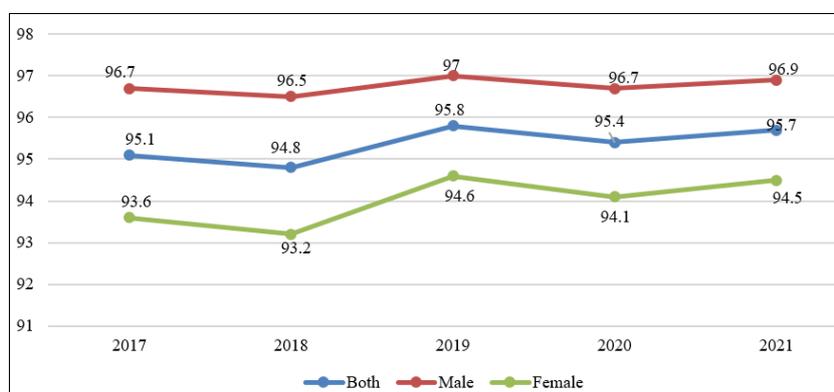
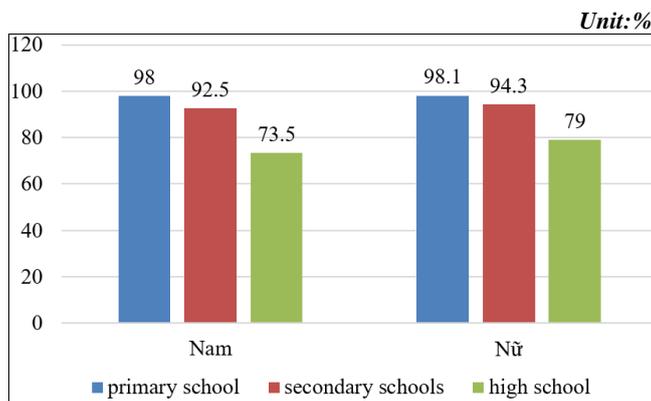


Fig 1: Literacy rate of population aged 15 and above in Vietnam in 2017-2021 by gender (%)

The literacy rate of the population aged 15 and above in Vietnam from 2017 to 2021 tends to increase over time. However, at all years the disparity between men and women is relatively large. Among males, the literacy rate has always been greater than that of females, especially in 2018 with a difference of 3.3 percent. But this gap is narrowing in 2019 (2.4% difference); in 2020 (2.6% difference); in 2021 (2.4% difference). This shows that literacy education policies are working and that these policies are aiming to create favorable school opportunities for girls.

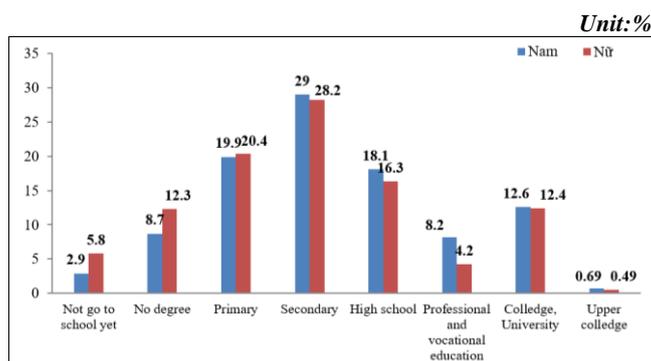
Also according to data in the survey on population change and family planning as of April 1, 2016, the current illiteracy by age among women of 63 provinces and cities nationwide said: With the age of 15-25, there are more than

128,000 illiterate people nationwide, including more than 61,000 women, accounting for 47.7%; Among the 26-35 year olds, there are 278,000 illiterate people, 150,000 are female, accounting for 54%. It is worth mentioning that women who are ethnic minorities who are illiterate are the majority. These are alarming figures on gender inequality in education for women and girls, especially women and girls in ethnic minority areas. The reason for this situation is that girls and women in rural and mountainous areas are still bound by customs and practices that negatively affect the achievement of gender equality in education. In addition, child marriage is still prevalent in ethnic minority areas, causing girls to drop out of school and be illiterate more than boys.



Source: GSO, 2020 Household Living Standards Survey

Fig 2: Net school attendance rate by educational level and gender in 2020



Source: GSO, 2020 Residential Living Standards Survey

Fig 3: Structure of population aged 15 and over by highest degree in Vietnam by gender in 2020

Fig 2 shows that there is a difference in the enrollment rate of girls at all levels, which is higher than that of boys. This shows the improvement in society's attention to education for children, especially girls, in recent years, along with the narrowing of the gap in gender equality in education. Between girls and boys. However, Figure 3 shows a different view of gender equality in education, reflected in the highest population structure by degree in Vietnam. Figure 3 shows that the proportion of the female population without education and without a degree in 2020 was 18.2%, which is 6.6 percentage points higher than the male population. The proportion of the male population with the highest degrees at all levels is higher than that of the female population. Women are less likely than men to attend school

and gain degrees. Many families also believe that women do not need to study much, just take care of family life is enough. New men need to learn to go out to earn money, strive for a career. This is the main reason why the female population with the highest degree is always lower than the male population, especially at higher education levels such as colleges, universities or masters and doctorates. In the field of education, teachers are very important subjects, playing a great role in orienting, teaching and transmitting knowledge to learners. The ratio of female teachers and lecturers shows the proportion of female teachers in the total number of teachers and lecturers at all education levels, helping to assess the importance of women in the field of education and training.

Table 1: Number of teachers and lecturers divided by gender and educational level in Vietnam in 2020-2021

Group	Whole country				
	General (thousands of people)	In which			
		Male		Female	
		Absolute value (thousands of people)	Proportion (%)	Absolute value (thousands of people)	Proportion (%)
Whole country	977,3	313,9	32,1	663,4	67,9
School level					
Primary school	384,7	82	21,3	302,7	78,7
Secondary school	286,7	87,6	30,6	199,1	69,4
High school	145,3	50,4	34,7	94,9	65,3
Vocational education	84	55,5	66,1	28,5	33,9
University	76,6	38,4	50,1	38,2	49,9

Source: Calculated from the 2021 statistical yearbook

Table 1 shows that female teachers account for a high proportion: accounting for 78.7% at primary level; 69.4% at lower secondary level; 65.3% at high school; 49.9% at the

undergraduate level. At lower levels such as general education, in addition to teaching, there is also a need for considerate and meticulous care, the number of female

teachers accounts for the majority. In universities and pedagogical colleges, especially those that train teachers for preschool, primary and upper secondary levels, students are mainly female. But the proportion of female teachers is more modest than that of male teachers. In particular, female lecturers have much lower academic degrees than male lecturers. The gender gap at postgraduate level is quite large. Although the proportion of women with postgraduate degrees in Vietnam is over 30%, it is still only half that of men. The higher the level of education, the greater the disparity, especially for doctoral degrees, doctors of science and professorships and associate professors. In 2019, in universities, female professors accounted for only 7%; female associate professors scored 11.4% and female PhDs 21.6%.

Paying attention to education is always a top and long-term priority of the Vietnamese Government. This has been reaffirmed in the recent Education Law (2019), whereby the Government commits to an open, modern, universal education system and building a learning society. This is further emphasized through annual budget spending on education, which in 2017 was equivalent to 20% of total budget spending, or about 5% of GDP. As a percentage of GDP, this distribution is high globally, even when compared to countries with higher GDP than Vietnam.

**Table 2:** Average spending on education per person attending school in the past 12 months divided by expenditure and gender in Vietnam in 2020

Expenditure	Male	Female
Tuition	2572	2379
Contribute to school	534	507
Uniform	330	321
Textbook	332	334
Learning tools	299	288
Learn more	1277	1213
Other expenses	1629	1646

**Source:** GSO, 2020 Residential Living Standards Survey

Table 2 shows that expenditures on education differ between men and women. Specifically in most expenses such as tuition fees, school contributions or extra education. For men are both greater than for women, indicating that investment in education in boys is more focused than for women. Thus, in recent years, the education reform program has achieved some positive results in narrowing the gender gap between men and women in a number of areas such as literacy, increasing school opportunities for women, improving the quality of female human resources for the labor and employment market. However, gender inequality persists, especially in rural, mountainous and higher education areas, and some occupations hinder the creative development of girls and women in life.

## 5. Solutions to promote gender equality in education in Vietnam

Gender equality in education increases the quality of human resources and has the potential to positively influence the quality of human resources in the future. As the level of gender inequality in education decreases, that is, with each level of training, the ratio of women to men will increase and then the level and awareness of women in the family will improve, the number and The quality of investment in children's education will be directly improved through the

mother's education. Reality shows that gender inequality in education has a negative impact on economic growth and sustainable development because countries and peoples cannot fully exploit the potential and contributions of the entire society if men or women do not receive good education. Furthermore, gender differences in some majors can lead to gender imbalance in the field of labor and employment.

To achieve the expected goal of gender equality, especially in the field of education, it is thought that in the coming time we need to focus on the following issues:

*Enhance the role of policy-making agencies:* in the fight for the advancement of women, for social and gender justice, the role of policy-making agencies is extremely important. Especially for amending, supplementing, and promulgating synchronous policies and solutions to truly create opportunities and conditions for women to have more complete and comprehensive access to all types of education.

*Promote propaganda and education to raise awareness of women's equal rights,* especially women in rural, remote and remote areas. Propagate so that the community as well as women themselves can see the importance, great benefits and social significance of investing in women's education as an investment for sustainable development.

*Diversify types of education* at all levels and fields of study, and constantly improve the educational level of women in all forms. Strive to achieve equivalent enrollment rates between boys and girls from all social backgrounds, regions, programs, fields of study and educational levels. Encourage and have policies to attract women's enrollment in technical subjects at universities and vocational schools. Eliminate outdated feudal ideas that prevent girls from going to school. Increase women's participation in technical professions.

Fighting for women's equality in all aspects, especially in the field of education, is a job of great humane significance, but also extremely difficult, requiring perseverance, persistence as well as the collective efforts of the entire society and women themselves.

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