

Candidate 5 evidence

Hypothesis

There is a direct link between gender and the differences in educational attainment.

Word count

2134

Introduction

At present, within the educational system on average across all subjects girls earn higher grades than boys. This means that girls are outperforming boys in a range of subjects such as english and maths, ensuring that they leave school with an overall more enriching set of results than boys. Hypothetically this means that girls should have a higher potential in further education and finding future employment in comparison to boys, however this isn't necessarily the case. There is a direct link between gender and the differences in educational attainment. Gender is "either of two sexes (male or female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones" which means it is the product of the socially constructed roles, behaviours, attributes, activities that a given society considers appropriate for males and females. Education can be defined by "the process of receiving or giving systematic instruction, especially at university". Attainment is "the action or fact of achieving a goal towards which one has worked". There are two different ways to look at these circumstances, either with a common sense outlook or through a sociological explanation. A common sense outlook would be subjective, meaning that the knowledge is based purely on the opinions of the individual, reflecting their values and biases, their point of view. Whereas a sociological explanation aims to be objective, meaning that the knowledge is free of the biases, opinions and values of the researcher, it reflects what is really 'out there' in the social world.

A common sense explanation of differences between gender and educational attainment is that the boys are not succeeding because at that age they are too lazy to work, lack motivation and can't be bothered to make a genuine effort. A common sense theory would also say that girls know they have to work hard to get rewarding jobs and focus their efforts on their studies such as homework and exam preparations.

However, a sociological explanation challenges these taken for granted explanations and is based on research, so in this case a sociologist would investigate the attendance of each gender to class, bias from teachers to students, rate of socialisation etc. A sociologist would use impartial evidence such as statistics from the Office of National Statistics. The hypothesis for this essay is that there is a direct link between gender and the differences in educational attainment.

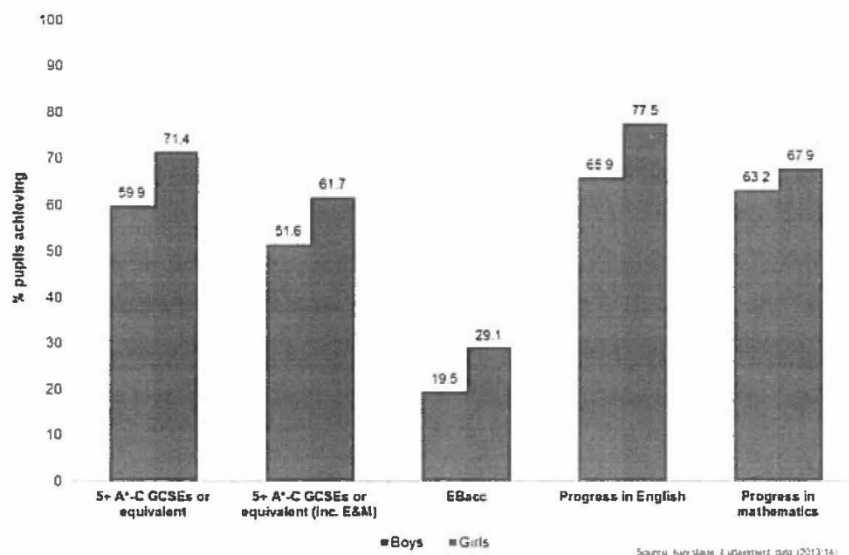
Research

Source 1: Reassessing Gender and Educational Achievement (Becky Francis and christine skelton 2005)

This study by Becky Francis and Christine Skelton (Chapter 1) on gender and educational achievement proves that there is in fact a gender gap which favours girls. However, the study these sociologists used for their research 'OECD PISA (2003)', showed that males slightly outperform females at secondary school level in maths and in some cases sciences showing that there are subject preferences for gender. Despite this, the study also stated that in all 43 countries involved in the PISA research, females came out on top in reading and literacy as well as examinations with 58.2% of females gaining 5 or more A-C grades at GCSE level compared to 47.9% of boys. Therefore this demonstrates that the higher educational attainment of females could be attributed to their affinity for language and literacy. This study also makes an important point that the gender gap within education is not a new occurrence, in fact it has advanced as females are now outperforming males right through to degree level.

Source 2: Statistics on percentage of pupils achieving key stage 4 indicators by gender

Figure 1: Percentage of pupils achieving key stage 4 indicators by gender.
England, 2013/14 (2014 methodology)



This graph shows that girls outperform boys by roughly 10 percentage points. 61.7% of girls achieved at least 5 A*-C GCSE grades or equivalent in the 2013/14 examination period compared to 51.6% of boys. This is a gap of 10.1 percentage points. It could be analysed that boys are pressured into doing subjects that are traditionally considered more 'laddish' at school such as sports or sciences and

maths and if they attempt to show an interest in a traditionally more female subject such as languages or literature then they may be subject to ridicule. Equally the social pressure of being a 'lad' at school doesn't include attributes such as working hard. Boys may prefer to conform to a peer group in order to feel comfortable rather than go against the social norm.

Analysis

Both sources can be seen to agree to a large extent on the fact that females consistently outperform males at an educational level. The time between the studies is important to note with source 1 taking place in 2005 and the information for source 2 being collated in 2013/14, making it equally important that they both show similar results. However they disagree that boys perform better in mathematics with source 2 displaying a 4.7% attainment difference in females advantage. However source 1 believes that boys have a slight lead in the mathematical subjects. It is also important to acknowledge that both sources are based on English results from their educational system, therefore comparisons such as that of Scotland with a different educational system may be difficult to make.

Functionalists view society as an organism. In this biological analogy, education is likened to an organ, which is part of the body that is society. If schools work, society will subsequently work. A functionalist such as Talcott Parsons would argue that education is a key agent in our secondary socialisation, taking over from primary socialisation. He argued that this take over was necessary because wider society works with different principles to our agents of primary socialisation (family). Therefore if children want to become integrated with society they must adapt. Linking in, it could then be argued from a functionalist perspective that the success of a child at school and in further education could be down to their socialisation. For example, boys are given football strips and lego bricks to play with as children so as they grow up they will be more likely to choose sports or manufacturing as subjects whereas girls are given dolls and fairytale books so will adhere to subjects such as Art or English. A functionalist view would disagree with both sources 1 and 2 as it does not see a gender issue but instead a meritocracy. A meritocracy is the idea that there is equal opportunity- everyone has the chance for success and it is the most able who succeed through their efforts. Subsequently according to a functionalist the most talented, with the best qualifications are allocated the best occupations that are the most important to society.

A feminist viewpoint, from those such as Sue Sharpe (*Just like a Girl: How Girls Learn to be Women* 1994), claims that there is inequality within society between men and women and laws are made by the ruling group, men. They argue that we live in a patriarchal society where the institutions of society are male dominated and values are being imposed by men, perpetuating gender inequality through the patriarchal structure. However they cannot possibly overlook the female success within education

that is proven in sources 1 and 2. Feminists celebrate this progress so far, celebrating female achievement. They essentially believe that now females are consistently outperforming males in education it won't be long until women move into higher managerial jobs and disband the gender pay gap. Despite this some female sociologists see the growing concern over boys lack of achievement as a moral panic. A moral panic is the process of arousing social concern over an issue. They argue that boys have been raising their attainment levels, just not as fast as girls, an issue in which the media is not helping by fuelling this moral panic and putting more pressure on both boys and girls to outperform each other. A feminist would say that the panic drawn from the success of females is that of the males who can see the breakdown of their old patriarchal power relations. Also, despite the positive results of girls education they still do not seem to be breaking through the glass ceiling in the world of work to achieve their full potential.

Evaluation

Source 1 uses the works of other sociologists, official statistics and non-participant observation. Therefore this source uses research methods that produce both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data is data that can give in-depth meaning to individuals thoughts, opinions and actions and is interested in describing concepts, definitions, metaphors and symbols. Quantitative data is data which can be counted and quantified and then displayed in a numerical format and is good at examining society as a whole.

A strength of non-participant observation is that the research subjects can act naturally so that accurate, valid data can be obtained. Also, if the non-participatory observation is covert, the subjects not only do not know they are being observed but, unlike covert participation, the researcher will not have introduced a change to the group whatsoever.

On the other hand, this method requires a lot of time as the observer cannot direct what is happening. As a result, many of the actions observed may be irrelevant to the research and it will be difficult to quantify behaviour. There is also no way of exploring issues further.

Source 2 used research methods that produced quantitative data. This source uses official statistics in order to gain their research which can be an advantage as it tends to cover a large sample area, sometimes the whole population, which increases their reliability. This is further enhanced by often being repeated on a regular basis so this can also save the researcher a lot of time.

However, official statistics do not tend to produce qualitative data and therefore lack meaning so they can describe but not explain social behaviour. Also, they may be biased because of the way data is collected and may be collected and presented for a specific reason. For example, unemployment figures before an election.

Conclusion

In conclusion my hypothesis 'There is a direct link between gender and the differences in educational attainment' is correct. The evidence presented proves that females perform better than males in education, producing a higher standard of results. It is clear that functionalists view education as a system that plays an integrated part with other agents of socialisation in the process of transmitting, norms, values and roles. Functionalists suggest that for a healthy society individuals must learn society's norms and values. This is important because this links what goes on in the education system with the needs of wider society, suggesting that a females success in education can be associated with her socialisation. A feminist takes a different view suggesting that the education system in the UK is instrumental in reinforcing inequalities in society, viewing patriarchy within the education system as the main enemy whereby males achieve and maintain the dominant position despite the fact that the evidence clearly point to the fact that females are outperforming the males. However, despite this the evidence from my sources does not explain why males are seeing continuing success in the world of work, finding themselves in higher positions than the females who achieved better at school, which is why a theory such as feminism is important, in order to further explain society. Overall, my hypothesis is true, and can be attributed to both factors inside and outside the school.

References

Definition of gender:

https://www.google.co.uk/search?safe=strict&hl=en&ei=cGKPXO7nHu2f1fAP5J---AU&q=definition+of+gender&oq=definition+of+gender&gs_l=psy-ab..3..0l10.87661.89268..89975...0.0..0.79.423.7.....0....1..gws-wiz.....0i71j0i67j0i131.p1RScvTSLmM

Definition of attainment:

https://www.google.co.uk/search?safe=strict&hl=en&ei=s2GPXIHHAcXuxgPYtrq4Dg&q=definition+of+attainment&oq=definition+of+attainment&gs_l=psy-ab..3..0l3j0i22i30l7.44128.45773..46935...0.0..0.190.1024.9j2.....0....1..gws-wiz.....0i71j0i67j0i131.Wed58goGBmU

Definition of education:

https://www.google.co.uk/search?safe=strict&hl=en&ei=42GPXP7tIJ-G1fAPzNuAwAw&q=definition+of+education&oq=definition+of+education&gs_l=psy-ab..3..0i67j0i9.138467.140073..140379...0.0..0.123.772.9j1.....0....1..gws-wiz.....0i71.NWPsGckgV3Y

Functionalist perspective:

<https://revisesociology.com/2015/01/26/functionalist-perspective-education/>

Feminist perspective:

<https://revisesociology.com/2016/04/26/the-feminist-perspective-on-education-uk-focus/>

https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/10_HLuPgfyYk4OqD5rBTsap1DNjgoySBY7T172rqxuUE/edit#slide=id.g40ee20dcea_0_132

Source1;

<https://www.routledge.com/Reassessing-Gender-and-Achievement-Questioning-Contemporary-Key-Debates/Francis-Skelton/p/book/9780415333252>

Information for graph (Source 2) taken from;

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/gcse-and-equivalent-attainment-by-pupil-characteristics-2014>