

Promoting Gender Equality in Moroccan Educational Institutions: Reality or Illusion?

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Abstract. *The paper seeks to investigate the extent to which the reproduction of gender inequalities in educational institutions shapes Moroccan students' identities through the intersection between gender stereotypes in the textbooks, manuals and media and the reproduction of traditional gender roles within family and society as a whole. By so doing, the paper argues that despite the fact that Moroccan universities have made good initiatives as far as the culture of gender equality is concerned by introducing gender studies course at the university level, the traditional gender roles seem to be still reproduced. The study particularly explains why a radical change from the pre-schooling to the schooling and the family institution to the higher education is important in shaping gender identities of Moroccan university students. It demonstrates that to promote the gender equality culture among students all stakeholders (policy makers, the family, media, educational institutions, etc.) should collaborate in order to reform the curriculum so as to deconstruct the stereotypes generated in the media and textbooks.*

Keywords: *deconstruction of gender stereotypes, gender equality, higher education, identities.*

Introduction

Morocco is a country where democratic change is making the headlines, and where all major institutions have been reformed to suit the progressive implementation of democratic practices, thus, it is no longer acceptable for a crucial field such as education to be portrayed as “a gender biased” field or as a place where students are still discriminated based on their gender. Despite the efforts exerted in empowering women and reforming education in Morocco, it seems that gender equality is still lagging behind. In fact, both gender and education are engineered by different sources of power and authority in the Moroccan culture, which are obviously observed in family and media. This is asserted by Sadiqi (2013, 15) who states that “Gender is

primarily constructed and reinforced in family socialization and education is primarily ‘manufactured’ by state policies.” Equally important, stereotypes in media and textbooks play a substantial role in the persistence of gender inequalities.

The present paper is divided into three sections: the first section provides a general theoretical background to the study. The second one describes the methodology used in this research. The study adopts the mixed methods approach, which combines both the qualitative and quantitative data collection procedures and which targets Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah university students as its sample population. The third section provides an analysis of the collected data. The last section puts forward a set of strategies on how to implement gender equality in the Moroccan education system.

Theoretical framework

Starting from the assumption made by Nelly et al. (2009, 472), in which he claims that “Frequently, when the state expresses concern for gender issues in education, it sees the problem as one of equal access to education for both girls and boys, and of questions of women’s under representation within certain fields of study.” However, the issue goes beyond this limited level of understanding since it overlooks the substantial process of socialization that is responsible for gender identity formation, the neglect of which yields the consolidation of gender stereotypes and, consequently, the persistence of gender inequalities despite the initiatives that can be taken by stakeholders in this respect.

Following Stroquist and Fischman (2009), the concept of gender is constructed within the social, racial, religious, ethnic and economic conditions of men and women and understanding the intersectionality of gender dynamics is crucial to detecting moments in which the creation of new social attitudes and practices may be fostered.

The sociology of education provides a useful theoretical framework for our research questions. This theoretical framework is adopted following Volman and Ten Dam’s (1998) perspective with regard to the conception of gender identity. In this connection, the two authors note that:

Feminist strategies are still relevant in education as, despite vertical equality between girls and boys, students still receive different messages at school about their capacities, vocation in life and opportunities, and horizontal inequality continues to exist in the form of gender-specific educational choices. However, if feminist strategies are to acquire a place in education,

we feel that it is imperative to understand what gender, gender differences, gender inequality and emancipation mean to the present generation of students and to accommodate that meaning in educational practice. For this reason, we think the concept of “gender identity” is important in the sociology of education (Volman, Ten Dam 1998, 530).

Along the lines of the sociology of education as an approach to understand, explain and analyze the topic under investigation based on the assumption that it is through education that individuals interact in society in a global way and with its diverse components, the present study aims to discuss the reasons for gender inequalities observed at the university and to determine the most critical issues that require vital attention in the context of Morocco. The study also seeks to reflect upon how to shield and support gender equality in Moroccan institutions and eventually to propose a set of general recommendations and actions to be taken for their consequential execution.

To address the present issue, two hypotheses have been formulated:

1. It is hypothesized that the way boys and girls are raised and the way they are depicted in media and school textbooks strongly shapes their identities and their perceptions of the opposite sex.
2. It is assumed that raising students' awareness through the introduction of gender studies courses can promote gender equality.

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent has gender equality been achieved in Morocco?
2. Who is benefiting the most from it? And in which domains?
3. To what extent does there exist equality between females and males within Moroccan families?
4. To what extent are females and males depicted equally in media and textbooks?
5. To what extent does gender in/equality in families, textbooks and media shape students identity?
6. To what extent and how can the introduction of gender courses help decrease gender inequality?

Adopting the mixed methods approach, the study relied on both qualitative and quantitative data collection instruments. As to the former, a focus group interview was conducted with 19 students (11 females and 8 males) from the Women and Gender Studies Master Program at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences-Dhar El Mahraz, Fez. As to the latter, a questionnaire was administered to 163 students (97 were females and 66 were males) from the Department of English Studies at the two faculties of Letters and Human Sciences-Dhar El Mahraz and Sais, respectively. Out of

the 163 students, 115 students were BA students (semester 6), 42 were MA students and 6 students were doctoral students.

Perceptions of gender policies in Morocco

In answer to the question related to whether gender equality has been achieved in Morocco, 42% of the respondents disagree with the statement saying that gender equality has already been achieved in Morocco for the most part as Figure 1 demonstrates:

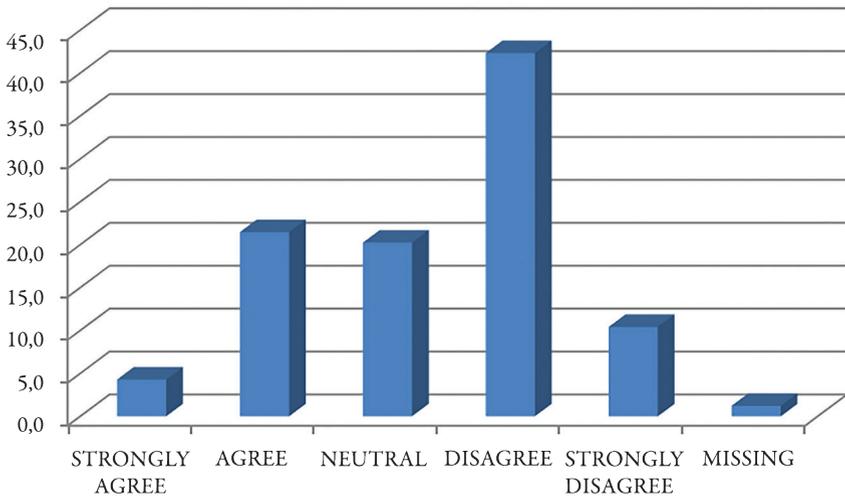


FIGURE 1: THE EXTENT TO WHICH RESPONDENTS AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT “GENDER EQUALITY HAS ALREADY BEEN ACHIEVED IN MOROCCO FOR THE MOST PART”

It is worth pointing out that this finding was confirmed by both males and females as mentioned by one female respondent who stated, “I don’t think there is social equality between men and women.” Similarly, a male respondent asserted that “there is no equality between man and woman in Morocco.”

The results also revealed that despite the fact that there exists some equality between males and females, this equality remains restricted to a particular category of Moroccans, namely the elite as Figure 2 demonstrates:

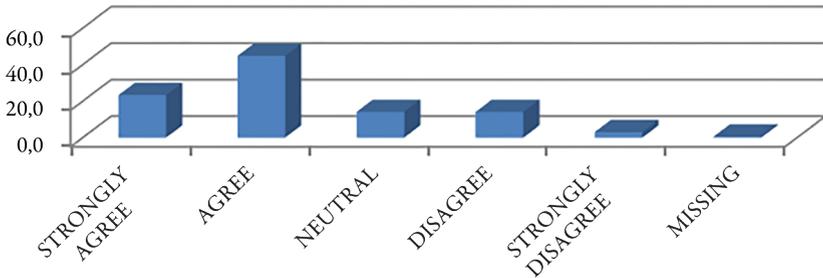


FIGURE 2: THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE RESPONDENTS AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT “MOROCCO’S CURRENT WORK TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY TODAY SEEMS TO BENEFIT MAINLY THE ELITE”

This can suggest that only favored segments of the society such as intellectuals, highly educated and upper-class people are more likely to benefit from gender equality in the Moroccan society.

As far as the domains where gender equality is apparent the most, the study revealed that education remains the most predominant area in which gender equality is observed as Figure 3 illustrates:

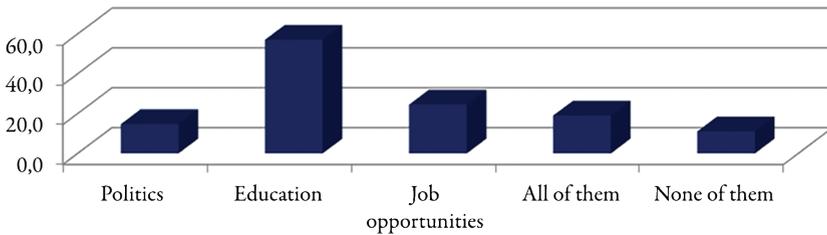


FIGURE 3: THE DOMAINS IN WHICH GENDER EQUALITY IS APPARENT THE MOST

According to Volman and Ten Dam (1998, 530), currently girls remain in the education system as long as boys and have quickly caught up with them in terms of the level of educational achievement, sometimes even managing to get ahead of them. Reflecting on the status of gender dynamics in the Moroccan educational system almost 60 years, Sadiqi (2013, 16) equally observed that

The number of female pupils and students has been on the increase at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels (over 60% at the tertiary level). However, the academic achievement of this female population decreases

drastically when it comes to employment especially in the higher spheres of decision making positions in both the private and the public sectors.

This statement is further confirmed by a female respondent, who asserted that females are confined to specific and common jobs (secretary, etc.), saying that: “In the job market I don’t think there is equality because the criteria of choosing employees in positions like secretary are different, directors surely go for females, they should be well presented the way they talk, you know [sic.]”

While referring to the less frequent presence of females in leadership positions in politics, another female respondent noted that according to the way Moroccans understand the Islamic culture and interpret religious texts only men should be leaders:

In leadership positions, we see a lot more men than women, so I think it is because of the misinterpretation of the religious texts and culture. We really see that a man is the one that directs a whole family and children and society and then the employees.

Factors behind gender in/equality in Morocco

Once the respondents were asked to rank the institution of family, school and media according to their responsibility for gender inequality in Morocco, the family institution stood at the top of the list as Figure 4 demonstrates:

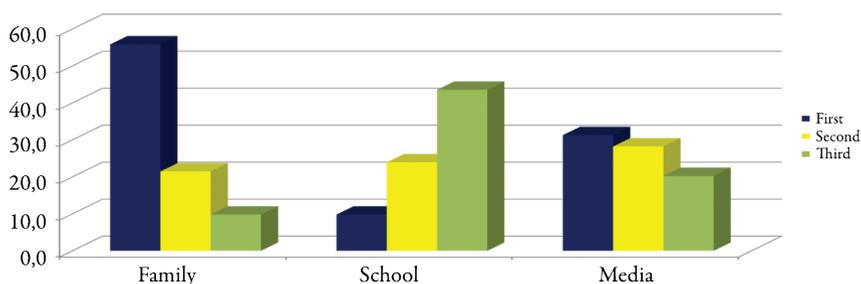


FIGURE 4: FACTORS BEHIND GENDER IN/EQUALITY

According to the findings, there are two major ways in which gender inequality is manifested in Moroccan families: inequality in the way girls and boys are raised and the different gender roles assigned to each sex.

The majority, 82% of the respondents, reported that girls and boys do not receive an equal treatment during their upbringing as Figure 5 demonstrates:

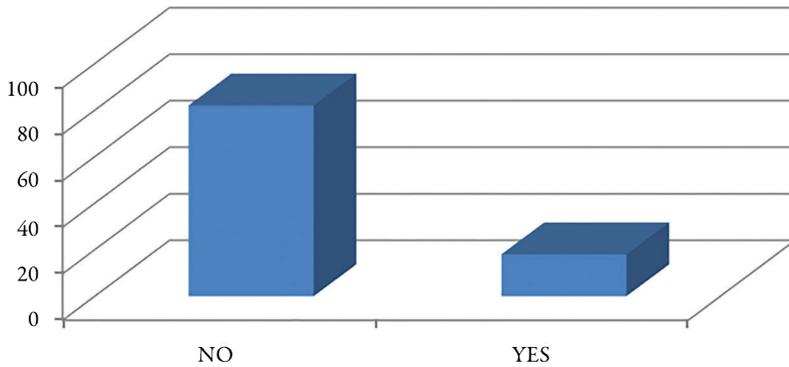


FIGURE 5: WHETHER BOYS AND GIRLS ARE RAISED EQUALLY

When asked to provide the reasons behind this unequal upbringing, the replies can be presented as follows: 27% of the respondents claimed that boys were believed to be the hope and future of the family, and 23% of the respondents also viewed the boys as the men of the house. However, 21% of the respondents reported that girls' ultimate place was in the kitchen and their husband's house, and 8% of them opted for the claim that girls were not as strong and intelligent as boys as the Figure 6 clearly demonstrates:

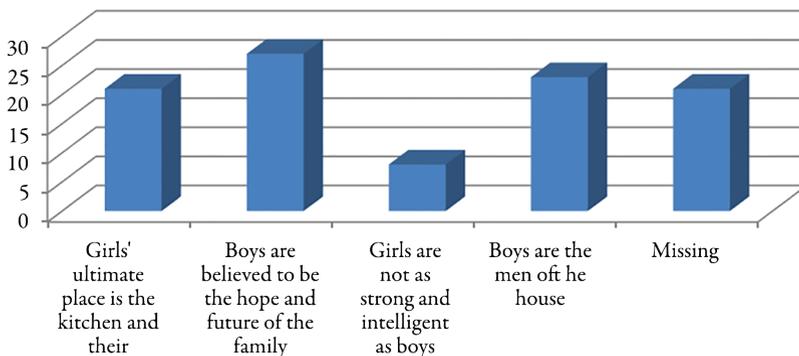


FIGURE 6: REASONS BEHIND THE UNEQUAL UPBRINGING OF BOYS AND GIRLS

What can be deduced from the above statistical findings is that the patriarchal mentality has a direct influence on parenting. One female respondent confirmed this finding by arguing that “parents still hold the idea that girls are inferior to boys, they shouldn’t travel, and they shouldn’t do things like boys who are more privileged than girls.” Likewise, another

female respondent noted that: “[...] the surrounding of the person (like the family) plays a huge role in gender issues. For example, parents raise their girls to be future mothers and show boys how to be strong and never cry.”

Further evidence in support of the above findings can be drawn from the focus group conducted in which one of the agents behind this unequal upbringing was found to be women themselves as claimed in the following statement of a male interviewee: “We find the first institution that enforces the domination of man over women is women themselves. Women are said to be the transformers of culture from one generation to another.” Another male interviewee even went a step further by considering women as responsible for reinforcing patriarchal mentalities within families as he pointed out in the following testimony: “I just want to talk about patriarchy, people associate this word mainly with men and they ignore there are women who enhance or enforce the idea of patriarchy in our contexts.”

The respondents also displayed various points of view regarding the issue of gender roles dynamism as Figure 7 demonstrates:

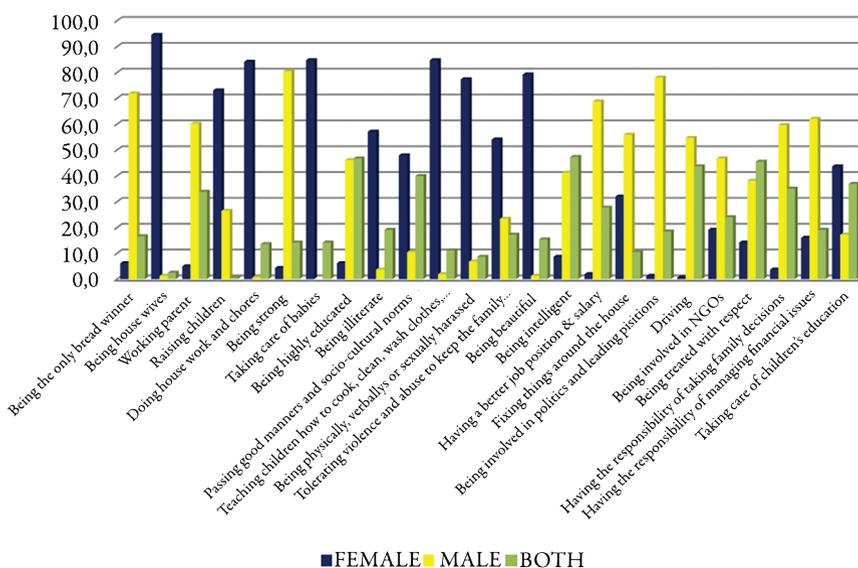


FIGURE 7: RESPONDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES EXPECTED FROM BOTH GENDERS

Although a first glance at Figure 7 may suggest that gender roles in Moroccan families are changing, these changes are merely limited to equal access to higher education and relative treatment of women with respect.

Nonetheless, some traditional roles are still maintained: such as raising children, doing housework, taking care of babies, being beautiful, taking care of children's education, etc. Even worse, the above findings demonstrate that women are even expected to be illiterate, subject to violence (domestic and other types) and even tolerate and resist violence for the sake of maintaining the stability in the family.

The last two views on women's expected roles are consolidated by one of the male interviewees who states that:

Males are supposed to be strong, taking and making hard decisions, having a good job position and a better salary than women. In contrast, females are the only creature who is supposed to take care of their children and take responsibility of them; they are supposed to be housewives in its real sense. They should tolerate all kinds of abuse and harassment to keep their homes safe. They do not have to be involved in political issues and decision-making positions. Furthermore, they are good at cooking, washing and shopping [sic].

What happens within the family institution seems to become more prominent in schools through textbooks and tends to be further consolidated in media through the stereotypes against women as one of the female interviewees noted:

Women in textbooks and media are represented as either nurses or housewives. The roles attributed to them do not require a sufficient level of intelligence whereas men are constructed as being both emotionally and physically powerful agents who can take care of decision making in politics. The language used in both media and textbooks is gendered.

Based on the data elicited from the respondents, gender inequality in textbooks and schools can be articulated in four major ways, the first of which is the use of stereotypical language to describe both genders as illustrated below in Figure 8:

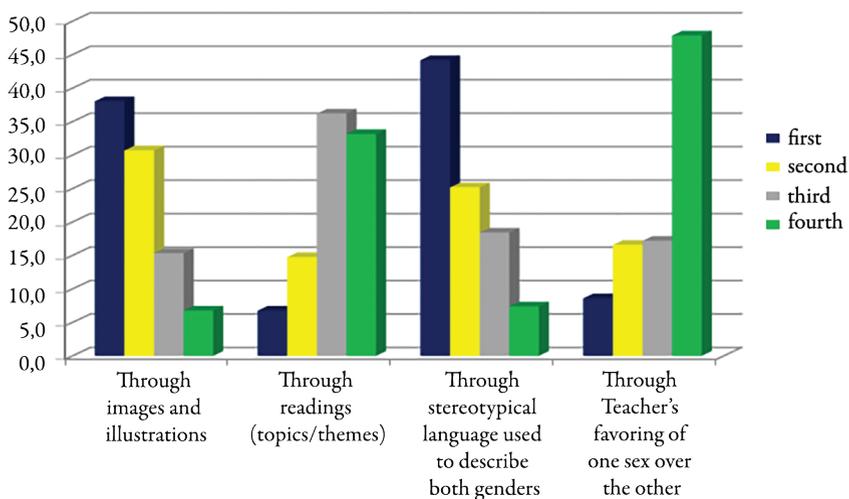


FIGURE 8: THE WAYS GENDER INEQUALITIES ARE CONSOLIDATED IN TEXTBOOKS AND SCHOOLS

Gender inequalities are commonly consolidated at schools through the teachers' stereotypical language as a male interviewee stated: "Professors being male or female always have this implication that boys are smarter than girls." Another male interviewee further stated that teachers pass and inculcate faulty messages: "What I was taught by some professors at high school is proven wrong, I don't say that males are more intelligent than females [...] If you tell students they [women] are inferior they will believe so."

What can be deduced from the above findings is that there is an over presence of the sexist language and stereotypes in comparison to the debate over gender issues as pointed out by Ennaji (2013, 25) who asserts that "Teacher education textbooks, for example, allocate minimal space to gender issues and at times give the topic little importance." Kane summarizes this point by arguing that "Education reproduces rather than challenges social inequality" (Kane 1995, 74).

As far as gender representations are concerned, the findings generally revealed that media present gender inequality via different tools and normalize gender inequality as a female interviewee claimed: "women are largely depicted as housewives, weak, dependent and beautiful while men are depicted as intelligent and strong who guide women and save lives, so media play an essential role [sic] in normalizing gender roles." More particularly, media foster gender inequality in advertising and print media as Figure 9 shows:

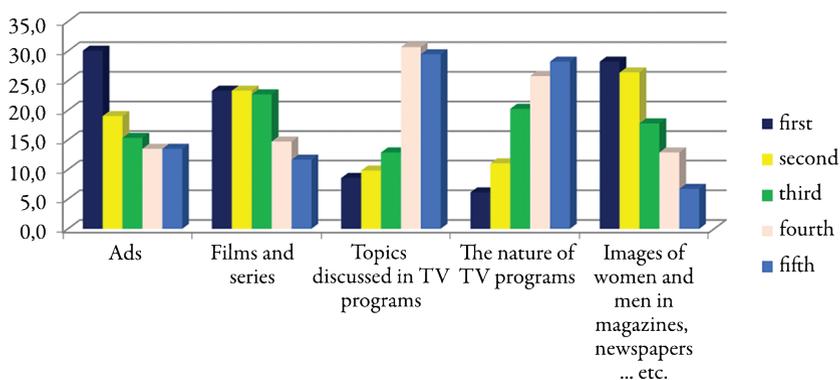


FIGURE 9: THE WAYS GENDER INEQUALITIES ARE CONSOLIDATED IN MEDIA

In advertising, for instance, women’s roles are restricted to the household as clearly expressed by a female interviewee: “Advertising enhances the fact that women are only housewives and they have to take care of their children and their husbands and it also promotes the idea that housework is for women.” Print media promote stereotypes and misrepresentations about women prescribing them only secondary and submissive roles in comparison to men. This is made clear by a male interviewee who states that: “[...] the representation of Moroccan women in newspapers [in the research] which I am conducting ... women witness stereotypes and misrepresentations in most cases and in most critical domains. They are depicted as a subordinate, submissive, illiterate, sexually constrained, powerless group... etc.”.

Gender inequality and students’ identity

As demonstrated in Figure 10, it is clearly obvious that gender inequality in the family, school and media institutions shapes students’ identities as 49% of the respondents confirmed this statement.

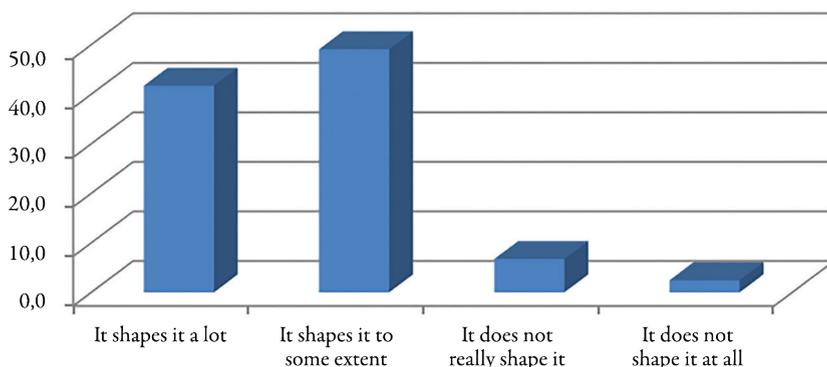


FIGURE 10: THE EXTENT TO WHICH GENDER INEQUALITY IN FAMILY, TEXTBOOKS AND MEDIA SHAPES STUDENTS' IDENTITY

The above findings are rooted in theories such as social constructivist theory. For instance, scholars like Lloyd and Duveen (1992) among others, argue that identity is derived from different groups or domains encountered by an individual. Viewed from another perspective, Giddens (1991) argues that the development of identity is a “lifelong project” in which self-image and the way a person sees her/his own life are repeatedly constructed and reconstructed according to the meanings and values that exist in society.

Gender courses and gender equality

To test the hypothesis formulated in this research, students were asked about their opinions on the extent to which the introduction of gender courses can help decrease gender inequalities at the university level. The majority of the respondents showed positive attitudes as Figure 11 below demonstrates:

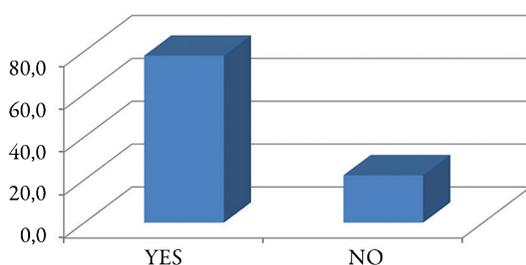


FIGURE 11: WHETHER THE INTRODUCTION OF GENDER COURSES CAN HELP DECREASE GENDER INEQUALITY

Supporting the statistical findings, one male interviewee argued that “Education is the key to abolish gender inequality.” The same statement was equally confirmed by a female interviewee who stressed the fact that “[...] education is one of the most important factors that can lead to gender equality in Morocco.”

When asked about the level at which gender courses should be introduced, the majority of the respondents opted for the primary level of education as Figure 12 demonstrates:

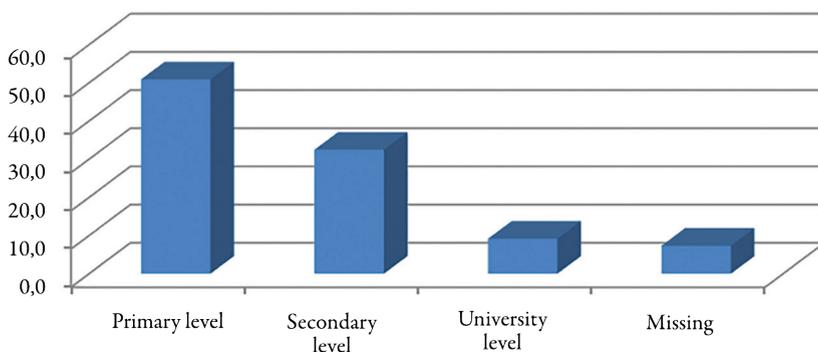


FIGURE 12: THE LEVEL OF EDUCATION AT WHICH GENDER COURSES SHOULD BE INTRODUCED

The choice of the primary level was supported by two motives. The first one is the belief that the deconstruction of gender stereotypes since the early age is easier as one female interviewee claims: “We should deconstruct the idea that Ali is by his desk and Amina is in the kitchen; the child should learn to consider a woman as equal human being.” A similar assumption is made by Davies (cited in Volman, Ten Dam 1998, 542) who showed how school children could be given access to discourses which enabled them to reflect on traditional gender discourse. The second motive has to do with the assumption that ideas are easier to mold or inculcate in children as stated by a female interviewee: “children will accept these rules more than adults.” This idea is also supported by developmental psychologists whose theories assume that the formation of the gender consciousness develops since early childhood. This question has been thoroughly analyzed from a feminist perspective since the 1970s (see Volman, Ten Dam 1998).

During the focus group conducted with students, they expressed their agreement with the following two strategies as the best tools of introducing gender courses. The first one has to do with the design of effective teaching

materials as one male interviewee suggested: “The primary focus should be concerned with the kind of materials used to address such issues (textbook, alternative media, etc.) for they are the vehicle of raising awareness – a major aim of the intended courses.” The second strategy focuses on the importance of practice over theory. This is made clear in the interviewee’s statement in which she said: “We should teach them [...] activities by involving girls in things that boys do and vice versa. We should teach them how to be equal to each other; there are many tools to do so.” This is further backed up by a male interviewee who stated that “gender courses should be introduced by some practical activities because children usually imitate their models – parents and teachers.”

The majority of the respondents reported that gender courses can help reduce gender inequalities in various ways as illustrated in Figure 13.

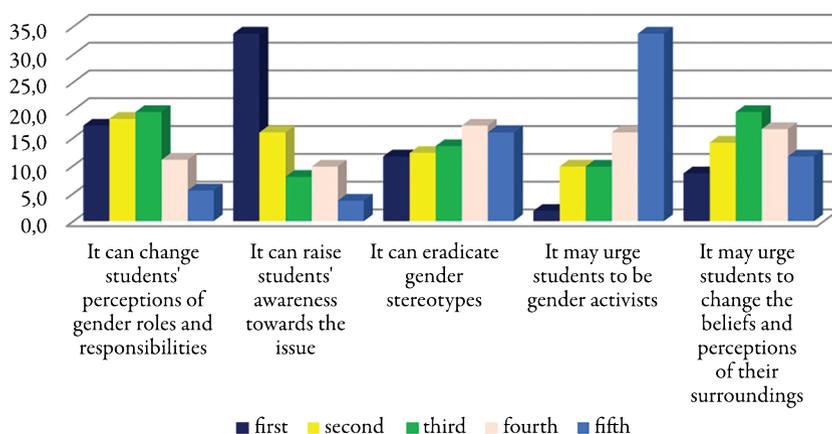


FIGURE 13: WAYS GENDER COURSES CAN HELP STUDENTS

Based on the findings presented above, the first way that gender courses can help is that they can raise students’ awareness towards the concept of gender equality. Another way of achieving gender equality can be done through changing students’ perceptions of gender roles and responsibilities. A further way can be to urge students to change the beliefs and perceptions of their surroundings. The last two ways can help in eradicating gender stereotypes and urging students to be gender activists.

It is worth mentioning that only 22% of the respondents reported that gender courses cannot help decrease gender inequality. The main reasons for that, in their opinion, is that the traditions and families foster gender inequalities no matter what is done and that men and women can never

be equal. Besides, they also opted for the fact that the course may be too theoretical.

Case study: women and gender studies MA students, SMBAU-FLDM-Fez

To cross-check and testify the validity of the quantitative findings and the second hypothesis assumed in this research, a focus group was conducted with MA students specialized in gender studies.

Five major motives behind the choice of Gender Studies as a field of specialty by the interviewed students have been identified. The first motive lies in the students' interest in the situation of Moroccan women and their exclusion from decision making positions as stated by a female interviewee:

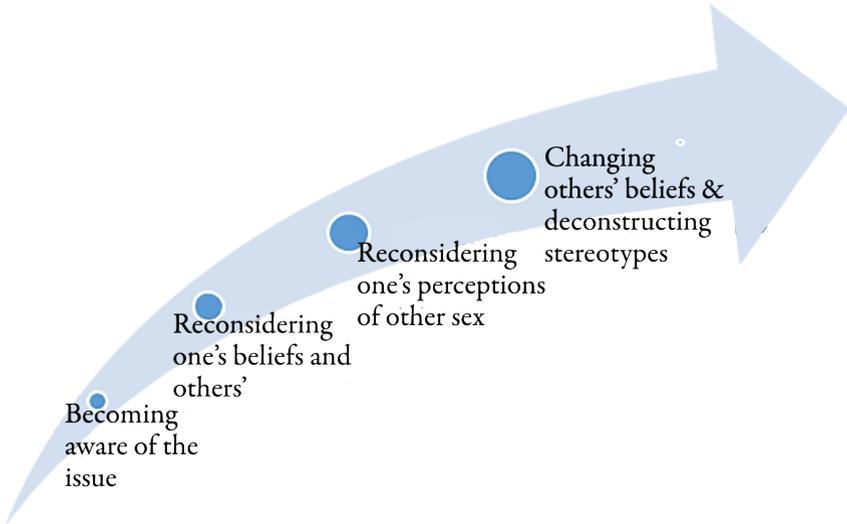
As a Moroccan female, I am interested in the situation of women in the Moroccan society and because it resembles the situation of other women in the third world there is exclusion of women from a lot of domains and fields like [...] politics and decision making.

Another motive has to do with the questioning of what is taken for granted as one male interviewee pointed out: "I have chosen this master program, because it aims at questioning what has been taken for granted." Another reason stated by the respondents is to have the opportunity to prove women's competence. This was made clear in one of the female interviewees' testimony: "I am also interested in going forward and proving the competence of Moroccan women." An additional motive which consists of understanding the other and avoiding gender prejudice was emphasized by another male interviewee who states that:

Gender studies [...] will give you the opportunity to understand the other be it male or female, to understand what they are doing and to not misjudge them based on their gender or appearance. It is enriching and helps people have a distance from how we perceive the others; it is a plus for me as a human being to understand the others.

The last motive is to readdress the domination of men over women and deconstruct stereotypes, which was stressed by a male interviewee who says: "First, being born in a patriarchal society, doing gender studies is an opportunity to try to redress the domination of men over women and to deconstruct the stereotypes about women and females as subordinate to men."

Based on the qualitative findings, we came to the conclusion that the impacts of taking gender courses can be considered as a process which varies from the initial stage of becoming aware of the issue to the stage of reconsidering one's beliefs and others, through reconsidering one's perceptions of the other sex up to the final stage of changing others' beliefs and deconstructing stereotypes. The schema below summarizes the different impacts of introducing gender courses at the university level:



SCHEMA 1: THE IMPACT OF TAKING GENDER COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

The chart below comprises testimonies from various interviewees on the different stages represented in Schema 1 to better illustrate the ultimate goal sought in taking gender courses, which is to raise and implement the culture of gender equality in the different institutions including family, school, media, etc.

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of our research confirm the two hypotheses formulated in this study. Firstly, gender inequalities in the family, media and schools were proved to shape students' identities. Secondly, the hypothesis that introducing gender courses can promote gender equality at Moroccan universities

TABLE 1. STUDENTS' TESTIMONIES REPRESENTING DIFFERENT IMPACTS OF TAKING GENDER COURSES

Stages	Impacts	Testimonies	
Stage 1	Becoming aware of the issue	<p>Being aware of the unfair practices towards women throughout history: Male: "Of course, the gender studies helps us get aware of the injustices that have been done to women across ages and centuries as being inferior and neglected."</p>	<p>Understanding equality/inequality: Male: "I can say that gender studies program has contributed to my understanding of gender equality: we adopt many theories, for example, we can better understand how equality works... it really helps enforce and enrich your knowledge and understanding of gender equality and inequality."</p>
Stage 2	Reconsidering one's beliefs and others	<p>Questioning what was taken for granted: Female: "Gender studies master program helps me question things that I used to take for granted or I didn't pay attention to."</p>	<p>Questioning the status quo at home (gender relations, female oppression by males, etc.): Female: "After taking these courses I started to act starting from home: I started to ask questions why my brother has the right to get out at night, and I doesn't, why he has the right to travel alone while I have to use many things... These are the questions I raised."</p>
Stage 3	Reconsidering one's perceptions of the other sex	<p>Discussing taboos freely: Male: "It was like a taboo to talk about homosexuality, lesbians and gays."</p>	<p>Perceiving the opposite sex as a human being: Male: "I think it changed me a lot: when you see a woman, you see her as an intelligent person." Becoming more tolerant towards the opposite sex: Female: "Now thanks to master studies I became more tolerant and I accept differences."</p>
Stage 4	Changing others' beliefs and deconstructing stereotypes	<p>Changing people's beliefs with evidence: Female "It actually gave me a lot power to face what I experience daily at home, with friends and even at work. Now I can talk about all that I was thinking by referring to scientific evidence..."</p>	<p>Changing stereotypes associated with Islam: Female: "This will help me to be a good Muslim: to change the stereotypes associated with Islam. I will change my attitudes and others' attitudes in order to give proper image about real Islam which is appropriate for all Muslims."</p>

was strongly justified. Nonetheless, the fact that some MA students' opinions and attitudes towards gender equality were very skeptical and somewhat negative though they were registered in a Gender Studies Master Program raise questions concerning the role of university and higher education in gender socialization. Tertiary education is expected to promote gender equality among its students; however, in the Moroccan context, the strong patriarchal mindset seems to overshadow the many attempts done by both national and international stakeholders to enhance the equality between the sexes in the Moroccan educational system, which makes these endeavors appear to be more like an illusion than a reality.

Given the fact that the involvement of parents, school, media, etc. can only stimulate but not impose gender equality in the Moroccan educational system manufactured by the government, this study puts forward the following recommendations (the collaboration between all institutions is imperative in order to promote a genuine gender equality in Morocco):

- At the family level, it is suggested that fighting gender inequality in parenting should be done by educating parents.
- Concerning schooling, it is proposed that introducing gender equality concepts from primary level to university can help implementing the culture of gender equality.
- As far as media are concerned, the revision of media programs will reinforce gender equality.
- Most importantly, a genuine collaboration between all stakeholders (policy makers, parents, teachers, students, media outlets, etc.) can only lead to the implementation of the culture of gender equity in the Moroccan society.

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Lyčių lygybė Maroko švietimo institucijose: realybė ar iliuzija?

Santrauka

Šiuo straipsniu siekiama išanalizuoti, kaip lyčių nelygybių reprodukuojimas švietimo institucijose formuoja marokiečių studentų tapatybes, kokią įtaką joms daro lyčių stereotipai, atpažįstami vadovėliuose, žinyuose, žiniasklaidoje, ir lyčių vaidmenys šeimoje bei visuomenėje. Pasak autorių, nors Maroko universitetuose jau galima įžvelgti teigiamų iniciatyvų, susijusių su lyčių lygybe (pvz., organizuojami lyčių studijų kursai), ten vis dar vyrauja tradiciniai lyčių vaidmenys. Straipsnyje paaiškinama, kodėl būtina iš esmės kitaip formuoti Maroko universitetų studentų lyčių tapatybes, jiems pereinant nuo pradinio išsilavinimo prie aukštojo mokslo. Skatinant lyčių lygybę tarp studentų, visos suinteresuotosios šalys (politiką formuojantys asmenys, šeima, žiniasklaida, švietimo institucijos etc.) turėtų bendradarbiauti, siekdamas reformuoti mokymosi planus ir dekonstruoti stereotipus, paplitusius žiniasklaidoje bei vadovėliuose.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: lyčių stereotipų dekonstravimas, lyčių lygybė, aukštasis mokslas, tapatybės.