AGEE

Accountability for Gender Equality in Education

Working Paper 3

Gender, and education systems: some reflections on conceptual limits and possibilities from researching Nigerian teacher education

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AGEE: Accountability for Gender Equality in Education

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Gender, and education systems: some reflections on conceptual limits and possibilities from researching Nigerian teacher education

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In the last decade two themes have had considerable prominence in education policy discussions – the need to focus on education systems, and the importance of attending to girls' education and gender equality. The COVID 19 crisis accentuated concerns with reviewing shocks at system level sand thinking about resilience (United Nations, 2020). Despite acknowledgement of the importance of working on gender at the level of education systems, as noted, for example, in the G7 *Gender at the Centre Initiative*[3]and the policy initiatives associated with the African Union Africa 2063 policy [4], there has been little conceptual or empirical investigation of what taking a gender perspective means for working on education systems. This paper, written mainly during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, sets out to explore this issue, building from insights generated from a research project we conducted, 2014-2016, looking at the ways in which teacher education in Nigeria reproduces forms of gender inequalities, despite strong policy commitments that it will effect change. We consider a number of different ways of positioning teacher education within an education system, highlighting some of the different ways in which systems can be understood and some of the implications of this for work on gender and connected equalities.

The organisation of the argument proceeds as follows. The first part presents a number of different ways to think about systems associated with education and considers how to locate some recent work on gender, education policy engagement and terrains of contestation within these 'big picture' analyses. The second part presents some elements of contextual conditions in Nigeria, where the contrasting versions of analysing the education system and aspects of gender dynamics will be examined. In the third section data arising from an empirical study with 4,600 student teachers conducted between 2014 and 2016 is presented. We pose some questions arising from these data. In the final section we draw on the analysis we have formulated regarding contestations about gender in terrains of a middle space (Unterhalter and North, 2017) and suggest some further development of the conceptualisation of gender and education systems drawing out some of the issues this poses for reviews of how to 'build back better' in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic.

Approaches to analysing education systems and some implications for thinking about equalities

In the last ten years, understanding and documenting elements of the education system has become a key feature of analyses to understand a range of different processes including why learning outcomes are disappointing (Pritchett, 2015; World Bank, 2018). For DFID, later FCDO, education systems were seen as key to addressing marginalisation (DFID, 2018; Herbertson, 2022). The Global Partnership for Education (GPE) viewed building education systems as central to how funding can be appropriately deployed. (GPE, 2016). The UN policy brief on *Education during COVID 19 and beyond* identified strengthening the resilience of education systems as being critical for enabling countries to respond to current and future crises and support equitable and sustainable development, and argued for the need for "education systems [to] address the vulnerabilities and needs specific to

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boys and girls, women and men, and to gender dynamics in times of crisis" (United Nations, 2020, p20).An education systems approach is core to GPE's strategic work on gender and has been implemented through workshops and peer learning associated with the Gender responsive education sector planning (GRESP) project (GPE, 2017; Fyles, 2018). However, despite a common invocation of a system approach across all these policy formulations, it is not always clear from the policy texts whether invoking the notion of a system hinges on a structured sets of steps from planning to implementation, as in GRESP, or a vaguer set of aspirations as in the DFID vision. Thus sometimes situating processes within a series of connections signalled by the term system is intended to signal vertical chains of connection and distribution, say from global to local, sometimes it indicates horizontal relations of governance and accountability, and sometimes amorphous notions of networks and interlinkages, which some have characterised as ecologies (Bronfenbrenner, 2009), and others as historical contexts (Philips and Schweisfurth, 2014). Honig and Pritchett (2019) distinguish between 'open' systems that have a 'starfish' characterisation, that 'just grow outwards', and compare these with 'closed' spiderweb systems, where there is an intricate relationship between different segments, and their design is highly ordered, with each section requiring the other. Tikly (2019) draws on the distinction between complicated and complex systems and identifies a range of complex systems associated with education.

In this evolving terrain contesting definitions of systems discussions of gender are not yet very evident.   One major stream of analysis, taking its cue from work on health systems, which are concerned with questions of governance and how this relates to outcomes, has been to analyse education systems in terms of their institutional shape (Cuconato, Tikkanen, & Zannoni, 2016), which suggests that how institutions shape and are shaped by gender relations is an important theme to consider. The RISE programme[5] , building on the work of the World Bank supported SABER (Sytems approach to better education result) programme, understands education systems as associated with how forms of bureaucracy function and looks at how they can be reformed (RISE, 2018). However, the work of RISE on gender and systems of bureaucracy gives attention to gender and the learning profiles of students (Kaffenberger and Pritchett, 2017), but little attention to the gendered dynamics of education systems.

 A key contribution to formulating ideas about education systems is presented in the World Bank (2018) World Development Report (WDR), which develops Pritchett's analysis of an education system, but makes very little of different ideas regarding gender. The term itself is used without much precision. It is equated with a delineation of *who* is excluded from schooling, noting that girls are generally a majority of those not in school because of income, location or conflict (World Bank, 2018, 60-61), discussed as a feature of the 'gender gap' in learning outcomes associated with reading or numeracy (World Bank, 2018, pp), or associated with specific interventions for girls or boys such as latrines (World Bank, 2018, page 148). This descriptive delineation of gender, which has been termed understanding gender as a noun (Unterhalter, 2005; 2007; 2016) is sometimes linked with a process of compounding other disadvantages (page 61), but without giving any attention as to what structural relations of power or forms of agency might be at work. Gender also appears in the report as a distorting norm, working to form 'stereotypes' presenting some kind of invisible contagion of education systems. However, this characterisation of gender as a norm considerably

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[5] https://www.riseprogramme.org/

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underplays the intersection of structures, processes, agents and discourses through which gender inequality is reproduced.

A somewhat different emphasis in how to understand education systems is particularly attuned to structural relationships and is concerned with the way these form particular kinds of inequalities. This is evident in the work of Hadjar and Gross (2016), who look at how structural processes in a political economy linked to inequalities and their intersections explain, for example, differentiation between academic and vocational streams, different levels of funding, different practices of access and certification, and different pathways of connection (Hadjar and Gross, 2016). What is to be understood and changed is the inequality, not the connections between institutions which comprise the system. This analysis brings out how gendered assumptions about work, for example, get imported into the academic/vocational segmentation of the education system. These are not only norms, but relationships of power, and esteem, associated with income and wealth: they are material as well as ideational. But in assuming gender is similar to other forms of structural inequality this analysis misses the mutability of the notion of gender (Unterhalter, 2011; Unterhalter, 2017) and the complexity of its intersections at different nodes of an education system (Williams, 2018; Unterhalter and North, 2017; Unterhalter, Robinson & Ron Balsera, 2020)

How gender is a feature of education systems is thus not a simple matter of description. A problem with all these system level analyses is that they need to account for specific features of a particular education system, for example why inequalities around race, class and gender take the form they do in different contexts, how they intersect, how policy engagement is differentiated, and who takes or refuses responsibility for what kind of change or rejection of reform. Thus 'alignment' between institutions and organisations, as advocated in the WDR may have perverse effects in some settings and benign effects in others. There is a rich literature that has considered these gendered processes through analysis of thirty years of policy and research work on gender mainstreaming and gender budgeting to try to bring about change in enhancing gender equality. This has had uneven effects and the consensus now is that there is not one single gender equality 'silver bullet' or institutional form of alignment for the reform of any education system (Porter & Sweetman, 2005; Moser & Moser, 2005; Unterhalter & North, 2010; Unterhalter, North and Ward, 2018). A number of reviews of work on gender and social policy at global, national and local levels brings out how contested and often fragile work in the direction of equalities has been, and the wide range of processes, relationships and actors that are needed to sustain these keeping in play both concerns with gender equality and women's rights (Harcourt, 2016).

This reflection on the work on gender mainstreaming and institutional systems raises concerns that work on education systems and their relationship with gender needs to take account of a range of situated intersections. Firstly, the fluid and partial meanings of gender which abound in the academic and policy literature and the ways in which different sites for education delivery, themselves historically located, draw selectively on elements of these different meanings which themselves intersect (Unterhalter, 2005; Monkman, and Webster, 2015; Manion, 2016; Unterhalter and North, 2017). Secondly intersections of gender and other social divisions taking account of how gender inequalities intersect with other social divisions, associated with socio-economic status, location, disability, ethnicity, race and age, all formed by global, national and local processes, and how education systems, themselves affected by these currents, may reproduce some of these intersecting inequalities and allow for challenge or change to others. Thirdly, some of the

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intersections in policy and practice between work on gender, women's rights, education and other area so social infrastructure - such as health, social protection, housing, transport, and active labour market strategies. Fourthly intersection of global, national and local concerns with gender and education and the range of relationships entailed in policy transfer, translation, and the building of global social movements around contentious issues. A range of global and national policy positions outline visions for gender equality in education. While social movements from the 1990s were generally associated with liberal or left politics, a feature of the last decade has been the emergence of social movements, including movements associated with gender which draw inspiration from values, often politically associated with the right, or far right. Studies highlight how the global language of rights, inclusion, quality and equalities are understood differently in national and local contexts and the kinds of alliances between different communities of practice that are made (Peppin Vaughan, 2018; Greany, 2008; Dejaeghere and Wiger, 2013; Manion, 2016; Unterhalter and North, 2017;). A critical literature on different feminisms highlight how, for example, African women have created their own definitions based on ideas of autonomy, self-reliance and survival, highlighting the heterogeneity of location, the depth of exclusion associated with colonialism and racism, and the ties of affiliation across local and diasporic relationships (Steady, 1981; Nnaemeka, 2002; Mikell; Ezeigbo, 2012).

In seeking to understand some of these intersections associated with gender which shape education systems, but are also shaped by them, our detailed empirical analysis of these processes with regard to gender, outlined below based on work undertaken before the COVID 19 pandemic, alerted us to the need to document what we termed terrains of a middle space. We see these terrains, are themselves settings for some of the intersections that are pertinent for thinking about gender in the responses to the huge changes wrought by the epidemic. These terrains are located between sites of global or national policy with considerable significance for the realisation of gender equality in practice. We considered these terrains had particular bearing on the formation of ideas about gender inequality in education and the limits on how much and in what ways gender equality could be supported and sustained by education systems shaped by particular policy discourses (Unterhalter and North, 2017). This analysis built partly from our reading of Grindle and Thomas (1991) and their approach to policy space as a site of process in which key decision-makers in government departments used choice, research, information and affiliation to take particular positions. They highlighted that a policy reform initiative may be altered by pressures and reactions from those who oppose it and that alignment is thus unlikely:

> Unlike the linear model, the interactive model views policy reform as a process, one in which interested parties can exert pressure for change at many points.... Understanding the location, strength and stakes involved in these attempts to promote, alter, or reverse policy reform initiatives is central to understanding the outcomes' (Grindle and Thomas 1991, p.126).

We extended exploration of the relationships in government Grindle and Thomas had documented to also take in relationships in different kinds of NGOs and in schools. In later work, developing some of these ideas, we have started to draw on a system of provision (SoP) approach as delineated by Fine (for example, 1994, 2010), who alerts us to structures, agents, relationships and material culture, which can facilitate or impede the realisation of policy and help support equalities in education (Unterhalter, 2018). For Fine, a SoP approach can be used to look at provisioning of any

form of human development, with studies already proliferating on SoP in relation to health, housing, water and transport (Bayliss and Fine, 2020). The SoP approach emphasises that economic and social reproduction associated with, for example, education systems and private or public consumption or some mixture, needs analysis. The SoP is concerned with documenting not only bureaucratic 'alignments' with family or school relationships, but as part of a complex formation of who gets what and why, in which gender is clearly in play. In addition, the SoP approach is concerned with the norms of provisioning and some of the material cultures associated with the SOP, which Fine (2020) highlights as highly diverse. He characterises these as 'Constructed, Commodified, Contradictory, Conforming, Construed, Contextual, Closed, Collective, Contested and Chaotic'. These complex dynamics resonate for us with the many forms of intersection we have noted as features of the terrains of a middle space. This clear focus on norms of provisioning and material cultures, seems particularly apposite in reflecting on the policy discourses with regard to gender and COVID 19, where the main issue that is emphasised in violence against women, and the risk of girls who become pregnant being excluded from school (UN, 2020; World Vision, 2020)

In thinking about a location for gender in relation to discussions of education systems, we draw on our analysis of the implementation of the MDG policy framework with regard to gender and education. (Unterhalter and North, 2017). Here we documented the middle space as extensive. stretching between two poles. One is constituted by a policy text, concerned with gender, the other comprises a series of finished actions signalled by the text such as enrolling girls and boys in school without discriminating on grounds of poverty or gender or supporting a teacher to deliver gender responsive pedagogy. This middle space, which may be understood as a SoP, has a number of different contours, which will be different in different country contexts, and is populated by diverse groups, themselves engaged with relationships that are structured and may work to reproduce or disrupt forms of gender inequality. This means that perspectives on gender equality are not just articulated in one terrain. In our analysis we identified four terrains of the middle space, but this is by no means an exhaustive delineation and the SoP analysis prompts us to look more widely. We identified one terrain of the middle space as what Habermas (1989, 1996) and Taylor (1993) have called the public sphere, another, as a space of institutions, which frame, for example, the content and conduct of laws and regulations on gender equality, the organisation of a civil service, and assumptions about the exchange of money and service. Thirdly, we noted the significance of areas where institutions do not govern all aspects of social relationships. For example, relationships of professional conduct, trade union organisation, community work, or academic exchange. In all of these, the many chaotic and constructed forms of provisioning Fine (2020) identifies are in play, and the reduction of reach of state institutions during the pandemic might amplify their importance. A fourth space, we described, comprised constructed relationships of sociability, such as the networks of friendship, the normative practices of some NGOs which aim to cohere round a common set of values, or other types of association. It is clear that these terrains of a middle space are themselves very different. Some are formal and 'hard edged' like institutions, while others are informal, highly mutable and difficult to 'pin down'. Some comprise loose formal and informal elements. An education system thus has formal and informal, material and discursive elements, which are all highly germane to understanding the different dynamics, relationships, and discords with respect to gender. Different kinds of intersectionality are also in play, as meanings of gender can be very controversial, and a range of formations of power require examination (Williams, 2020)

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We want to draw on these framings of terrains of a middle space and SoP to generate a critical discussion of some of the analysis on education systems, their limited concern with refining meanings of gender, some of the implication for thinking about teacher education and the analysis of gender in response to the coronavirus pandemic. We propose to do this through some reflection on some data we collected in 2014-2018 as part of a study of teacher education and gender equality in Nigeria (Unterhalter, North, Ezegwu and Shercliff, 2018). The next step of the argument comprises a brief presentation of some salient features of education and teacher development in Nigeria, and a summary of some of the data from our study in five states. In the third part of the paper we draw on some of the implications of this study to consider the question of terrains of a middle space, SoP and approaches to gender equality and education systems in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic.

Teacher education in Nigeria

Nigeria has policy commitments to basic education for all children, and support for girls' education and gender equality enshrined in law (FME, 2004, 2013). Yet, translating this into practice has proved extremely challenging. In 2013 the gross enrolment ratio for girls and boys at primary school was 92.84% at primary, but only 53.49% for girls and 58.78% for boys at secondary level (UIS, 2018). Around 10.5 million children aged between 5 and 14 years were out of school in 2019, making this one of the largest out of school populations in the world, although the out-of-school rate for primary-level education saw limited improvement, dropping from 27.2 per 11 cent in 2016/17 to 25.6 with considerable variation between states (UNICEF, 2023). The education system is marked by inequalities – 75% of primary-school aged girls living in rural areas in the lowest economic quintile are out of school compared with just 3% of boys living in rural areas in the wealthiest economic quintile (WIDE, 2019) Demographic and Health Survey (NDHS) data for 2013, shown in Table 1, reveal how regional divisions in one aspect of education, literacy, are starkly different across a north south divide, with marked gender dimensions.

Table 1 - Literacy status of women and men aged 15-49 by region

Geopolitical zones	% Women literate	% Men literate
North-central	54	82
North-east	28	51
North-west	26	62
South-east	84	91
South-south	81	93
South-west	82	87

Source: NPC (2013: 39)

Well trained teachers are crucial for the provision of quality education, and can play a role within an education system helping to engage with aspects of gender equality and inclusion. A paucity of qualified and appropriately skilled teachers is one factor that has been identified as limiting progress towards the provision of UBE, Nigeria has an enormous teacher shortage with 400,000 additional teachers required between 2012 and 2030 (UNESCO 2015). Teacher shortages are most marked in Northern States: in Kano for example, in 2009/10 the ratio of pupils to trained teachers was more than 100 to one, and in more than half of local government authorities this rose to 150 in the most disadvantaged 25% of schools (UNESCO 2015).

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The most recent compilation of data from the Nigeria Digest of Education Statistics 2006–2010 (Humphreys and Crawfurd, 2014) shows that although in southern geo-political zones women make up the majority of teachers, in northern zones the trend is reversed, with women representing only between a quarter and a third of teachers. Meanwhile, in some zones qualified teachers are only about half or less of all teachers employed. While in some zones the vast majority of women are appropriately qualified, in others qualified women teachers make up a small proportion of teachers employed.

Table 2 - Proportion of qualified teachers by gender and region

Geo-political zone	% female teachers	% male teachers	% qualified teachers	% of female teachers who are qualified	% of male teachers who are qualified
North-west	26.5	73.5	46.1	25.8	53.5
North-east	24.7	75.3	42.8	55.5	38.6
North-central*	35.5	64.5	75.7	98.1	63.5
South-west	73.3	26.7	98.5	99.2	96.7
South-south	68	32	55.4	58.5	48.5
South-east	76.7	23.3	77.4	82.2	61.7
TOTAL	47.3	52.7	65.1	73.5	57.5

* No data recorded from Plateau State.
Source: Humphreys and Crawfurd (2014)

Policy interventions concerned with improving teacher recruitment in order to address shortages of qualified teachers, have included establishing clear-cut uniform recruitment criteria requiring a standardised minimum level of qualification, with attention given to enhancing quality in the preparation of teachers (FME, 2013). The minimum qualification required for qualified teachers is the National Certificate of Education (NCE), a sub-degree level qualification, which can be obtained through study at colleges of education or polytechnics. Degree and postgraduate level teaching qualifications can be obtained through university study (Adeoye et al, 2014; Ogunyinka et al, 2015). The Federal Government of Nigeria has established federal development training institutions, including the National Teachers Institute (NTI), and international bodies such as UNDP, the World Bank, DFID, UNESCO and USAID have been involved in developing capacity building partnerships (Chukwu, 2010). Studies have observed that teacher recruitment, deployment and retention policies vary across states and levels of governments, and are subject to political dynamics and influences (Dunne et al., 2013; Humphreys and Crawfurd, 2014; Kontagora et al, 2018).

Gender has been a concern for decades in reviewing the work of teachers in Nigeria (British Council, 2010). The National Teacher Education Policy (NTEP), has been criticised for lacking a gender dimension (Mulugeta, 2012), but efforts were made to include a consideration of gender issues in the revised teacher education curriculum of 2012. Three federal bodies – The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and The Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) – developed minimum standards for teacher education and teacher professionals that support the implementation of a revised 9-year basic education curriculum, stressing the inclusion of all learners (NCCE, 2012; TRCN, 2012;

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Nwokeocha, 2013). The Quality Indicators for Teacher Education (NCCE, 2012: 9) include "evidence of progress towards implementing policies and good practice relating to gender sensitivity". In addition, there has been some development of work on gender in a number of different Nigerian universities, and the emergence of a body of research and policy engagement regarding gender and education (British Council, 2012; Odejide et al, 2006; Pereira, 2002; Para Mallam, 2017**).**

Our empirical study of gender and teacher education in Nigeria, conducted in 2014-2018, set out to investigate teachers' views about the ways in which gender equality issues were handled in teacher education courses, and examine the extent to which newly qualified teachers felt their pedagogic practices engaged with ideas about equalities data for a mixed methods study were collected over four phases. In 2014, 4524 student teachers in their final year of study in 11 colleges of education and faculties of education in universities across five states – Lagos, Rivers, Kano, Sokoto and Jigawa – were surveyed (table 3). Interviews were conducted with key informants at universities and colleges in each state. Survey questions focused on the demographic backgrounds of the student teachers, their motivations for training as a teacher, their views on what they had learned during their training, and how much attention there had been to issues of gender and inclusion, and the attitudes towards gender equality issues.

Table 3. Number of Students surveyed in 2014 by state, and type of institution

State	University	College of Education	Total
Lagos	228	765	993
Rivers	502	441	943
Sokoto	208	819	1027
Kano	-	629	659[6]
Jigawa	-	902	902
Total	938 (21%)	3556 (79%)	4494

In the second phase a telephone follow-up survey was conducted with survey participants from the first phase between February and March 2015. Difficulties with network services and reaching respondents meant that just over 50% of the initial cohort was contacted. The follow-up survey was designed to establish the current occupations and locations of the recently graduated teachers. Based on this information in each state, six junior secondary schools where a sub-sample of those initially interviewed in 2014 were working as newly qualified teachers were selected for in-depth data collection. In each school interviews were conducted with the school principal, one newly qualified teacher from the 2014 cohort, five other teachers, 10 each of male and female learners. These interviews focused on participants' views on and experiences of gender equality and inclusion.

In the final phase of data collection a second follow up telephone survey with the original survey participants was conducted to establish how employment patterns had changed since the first follow up survey, and in the final phase in 2018 focus group discussions to reflect on emerging

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[6] It was difficult to survey 1000 students in Kano because of the security situation.

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findings were conducted with two groups of participants – newly qualified teachers who were in and out of work – in each state.

Analysis of the demographic backgrounds of survey participants revealed notable differences between the different states. Although in the overall sample there were more men than women, with men making up 57% of the total, in the two Southern States of Lagos and Rivers there were more women than men: women made up 74% of the sample in Lagos and 63% in Rivers. In contrast, in the three Northern states men outnumbered women: in Jigawa state women made up only 13% of the sample. While in all states few participants indicated that they came from very rural areas, here too there was variation: three quarters of the students surveyed in Lagos and up to two thirds of those surveyed in Rivers, Kano and Sokoto spent their pre-primary years in medium or very large towns. In Jigawa, however, only 40% had this background, and 20% of participants came from locations that had only one primary school or no school at all.

Participants were also asked about the occupational background of their parents, and a socio-economic score was calculated on the basis of this. Students from Lagos state had a higher mean socio-economic score than those from other states, indicating that their parents were employed in occupations that were ranked more highly. However, because household mean socioeconomic status was calculated by adding together the occupation of students' fathers and mothers, this may not reflect higher status, as much as the fact that students studying in Lagos were more likely than those in other states to mention that their mother was in formal employment. Overall socio-economic scores of participants in the three Northern states were lower than those in either Lagos or Rivers in the South.

When asked about their motivations for studying a teacher training course, fewer than half of all students in Lagos, and less than 60 per cent of students in Rivers indicated that this was because they wanted to become a teacher. A significant group of respondents in these commercially important, and relatively urbanised southern states, suggested that they hoped to take a different course but were not successful in gaining admission to their preferred programme of study. In contrast, in Jigawa, where a much higher proportion of students are from small villages and lower socio-economic backgrounds, the vast majority (82%) of participants indicated that they wanted to become teachers. This might reflect the fact that Jigawa is among very few states where the teaching profession has been relatively 'face-lifted', while "the same cannot be said of other states where teachers are still neglected" (UNESCO, 2006: 42). Jigawa also has record of paying teachers better than other states (UNESCO 2006).

Teacher engagements with gender
The data collected through the surveys and interviews revealed considerable variation with regard to how teachers engaged with issues around gender equality and inclusion. Based on survey responses to questions regarding the amount of attention given in their education courses, an inclusion score was calculated, which indicated what was said about the depth of coverage of topics associated with gender, girls' education and forms of exclusion. This revealed that neither students nor staff indicated in-depth coverage of issues concerning gender and inclusion, although university staff, rather than their students, felt more is taught on these themes. The mean inclusion score was higher for female students, compared to males, suggesting that they may be more receptive to gender inclusion issues being raised, although for neither group was it very high. Students were also

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asked a number of questions about the elements of the course they were studying that they found most and least interesting. The general feature of responses was that larger proportions found the elements of the course that dealt with the concrete practice of teaching (e.g. planning lessons for teaching practice) or appreciating aspects of teaching as a profession the most enjoyable and interesting, while those aspects that dealt with gender and learning needs, puberty and issues around sexual and reproductive health, were mentioned only by a minority as being particularly interesting. This suggests that the content of courses in this area may be particularly difficult or distancing for a substantial majority of students.

As well as commenting on what they had learned in their teacher training, participants were also asked to respond to a series of statements which sought to elicit insight into their views regarding different aspects of gender equality. Table 4 provides examples of some of these statements, showing the proportion of men and women who responded positively in each case.

Table 4

Views about girls' education and women in leadership	Men	Women
Strongly agree women have the right to hold leadership positions in the community	21%	59%
Strongly agree a female president can be as effective as a male president	16%	57%
Strongly agree girls have the same right to go to school as boys	53%	85%
Strongly agree girls should be allowed to play sports	38%	68%
Strongly agree boys should be allowed to play sports	72%	89%

Here clear differences can be seen between the responses of male and female students: although the majority of both groups strongly agreed that girls have the same rights as boys to go to school, only just about one fifth of male students strongly agreed that women can take political leadership positions, and only just over a third felt that girls should be allowed to play sport.

Based on participant responses to the full range of statements, the project developed a gender and education attitudes index to assess the views of student teachers on facets of gender equality in education. The overall gender equality index was broken down into three sub-indices concerned with gender equality in public life and the home, a challenge to conventional views on masculinities, and teacher professional conduct. Table 5 shows the proportion of students who met the minimum threshold identified as indicating a 'positive attitude' in relation to each of these indices.

Table 5: gender and education attitudes index, by various characteristics

	% of teacher trainees with positive attitudes on:			
	Gender and education (index)	Gender equality in education, public life and	Challenging conventional	Teacher professional conduct and

		the home (sub-index)	masculinities (sub-index)	inclusive practice (sub-index)
Sex				
Male	9.8%	31.7%	81.8%	0.9%
Female	30.0%	77.4%	68.7%	1.0%
State				
Sokoto	7.9%	27.3%	80.1%	0.1%
Jigawa	3.7%	17.4%	86.0%	1.5%
Kano	11.4%	37.1%	84.7%	1.7%
Rivers	29.1%	81.0%	70.1%	0.9%
Lagos	37.4%	88.3%	62.3%	0.9%
TEI type				
University	29.4%	73.3%	69.2%	1.1%
Polytechnic	3.3%	10.3%	100%	0.0%
College of Education	15.4%	45.3%	77.7%	0.9%
TEI status				
State	12.5%	38.0%	78.6%	0.9%
Federal	25.0%	65.3%	72.9%	1.0%
Private	21.1%	74.6%	80.3%	1.4%
Father's SES group				
No wage	16.9%	49.1%	76.3%	0.6%
Unskilled	7.8%	29.1%	84.6%	1.5%
Skilled	22.7%	57.5%	73.7%	1.2%
Professional	21.1%	59.7%	72.6%	1.1%
Mother's SES group				
No wage	11.6%	38.4%	80.4%	1.0%
Unskilled	17.6%	64.2%	76.9%	0.0%
Skilled	29.3%	71.6%	69.2%	0.8%
Professional	31.9%	71.2%	70.3%	1.6%
ALL	**18.2%**	**50.7%**	**76.1%**	**0.9%**

It can be seen that women were more likely to have a positive overall attitude towards gender equality than men, that attitudes in the southern states were more in the direction of gender equality than in the northern states, and that university students scored higher on the general gender and education attitude score compared to college students. Fathers', but more particularly mothers', socio-economic status have a key relationship with the proportion of those who have more positive views on gender equality.

However, the sub-index scores indicate important nuances. While views on gender equality in the public and private sphere were very different amongst men and women, views on challenging conventional views of masculinity were not that different, nor were views on teacher professional conduct and aspects of informal gender inequality, where scores were low for both men and women. The north-south divide in attitudes on gender was evident, and Jigawa, the state where the

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largest proportion of students envisaged a career in teaching, had the smallest proportion with positive gender equality in views. However, interestingly, there were higher scores on the importance accorded to challenging conventional views of masculinity in the northern states, compared to the south, and this may be linked to particular cultural and religious codes in the predominantly Muslim populations of the northern states who express ideas concerned with brotherhood and community amongst men.

The data suggest that amongst the groups who said they were most likely to take up teaching, the smallest proportion held positive views on gender equality. These groups also appear to be those who have responded least well to the teaching on gender equality and inclusion they have received in their teacher education courses. The data thus reveal a very significant mismatch between the policy pronouncements on gender equality in education and the views held by many of the student teachers that will enact these policies through their work in schools.

The data collected in schools in the second phase of research, in which respondents were asked to respond to the same set of statements regarding their views on gender equality, further emphasised this disconnect between policy aspirations and their realisation in practice. In all states except Rivers only one third or fewer teachers in schools of either sex received a positive gender attitude score. On average across the five states male teachers in schools tended to receive lower gender attitude scores than their female colleagues, although there were some variations between states: while male teachers received lower scores in the three Northern States, in the Southern states the reverse was true. On average, scores for both male and female teachers were higher in the two southern states than in the Northern states, reflecting the patterns seen in the student teacher survey. Scores among headteachers tended to be higher on average than those of teachers, though even here only 19% of male headteachers and 38% of female headteachers across the five states received a positive gender attitude score. Meanwhile, across all five states teachers reported very limited opportunities to participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) suggesting that there is very little support for teachers to take forward ideas about gender and connected equalities.

A challenge for any form of analysis of the education system is how to explain this mismatch between policy pronouncements on gender and the views of student and practicing teachers. Conventional explanations may focus on deficits amongst particular groups, such as low levels of knowledge amongst teacher educators, lack of student teacher motivation, or deep-seated norms around gender inequality in particular societies. However, none of these throw light on how the education *system* may be involved in helping to generate these relationships and processes which reproduce inequalities, but in different forms in the different states. Given the huge disjunctures for education systems associated with the suspension of schooling and tertiary education for many months in 2020, what kinds of new meanings and relationships might emerge? We turn now to look at whether deploying additional explanatory theory with regard to thinking about gender and education systems can generate more cogent analysis.

Gender and teacher education: Terrains of a middle space and delineations of features of an education system

Teacher education, both pre-service and in-service (sometimes termed continuous professional development or CPD) is clearly a key nodal point in any education system, and a site in which gender

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and other intersecting inequalities can be reproduced or confronted in an attempt to change these. However approaches to how we understand both gender and the education system will have a key bearing on the kinds of interventions made. In previous analysis (Unterhalter and North, 2017) we have distinguished three different ways in which the fluid concept of gender can be understood, and we think this has some explanatory power in thinking about education systems in general and teacher education in particular. However, these contested and contrasting notions of gender are in tension with some particular forms of the idea that are powerfully fixed through law, religious sanction, cultural stereotypes, and everyday practices. Global policy texts are also powerful discourses that set particular frameworks of meaning around gender. Our analysis delineated that meanings of gender range along a continuum

> from thinking at one end about gender as a socialised version of sex, conceptualised only along one binary division of male/female, moving through multifaceted structural relationships and mutable performances and intermixtures of sex, sexuality and gender, to at the other end an ideal, ethical or aspirational version of gender equality that dissolves or recognises particular forms of similarity or difference, and is more or less interested in how ideas are realised in practice. There are a number of positions in between and various permutations that combine elements along this continuum (Unterhalter and North, 2017; 30)

We think this notion of a continuum is useful to think about a number of different ways in which the idea and practice of gender is deployed in an education SoP and that this provides a generative framework for understanding some of the complexities of response around gender equality in the wake of the pandemic. To take a key notion in much education system analysis, how to develop and enhance accountability, we have written that building these relationships looking at i) what gender is constructed to mean, ii) what gender as a framework of analysis does, and whether this deployed in critical ways that enhance equalities or forms of commodification , for example iii) what the concept of 'gender', linked to normative aspirations regarding justice and equality, aims for and thus how outcomes may be evaluated systems (Unterhalter, North and Ward, 2018). In the first set of meanings gender can be understood as a 'thing' usually linked with biological categories of sex (men and women, boys and girls) or politically, economically or socially constructed roles or relationships assigned to these groups. Thus, the notion of gender equality in education can be captured by the idea of gender parity, which entails ensuring equal numbers of girls and boys, or women and men, access and progress through school or higher education, or ensuring equal numbers are employed in different kinds of work, at various levels of seniority. Delineations of education systems which work with this notion may be able to describe where different groups are located in an education system, but not in any depth why this is the case or how this may change.

A second set of meanings around gender in education systems focuses on what the concepts associated with gender as a critical framework or approach to analysis, *does* to define and explain inter-related processes associated with the exercise of political, economic, social and cultural power, the formation of hierarchy, social division and exclusion all of which bear on an education or health system and trace pathways regarding who gets what and how particular groups are described and treated. This approach is concerned to expose and critique the intersecting, cross-cutting relationships that encompass global, national and local networks and flows of money that support intersecting inequalities, and different processes associated with the exercise of power, access to

resources, and capacity to define and contest discourses. This critical framework entails implicit or explicit efforts to support and sustain equalities and consider women's rights as a key dimension of education systems that put questions of bodily integrity, ownership of assets, and participation in political and cultural processes centre stage. This kind of analysis allows us to develop a thicker meaning of gender equality in education that directs attention to the ideas, practices, and relationships entailed in any system that goes considerably beyond an institutional or organisational network analysis.

From this perspective, we would look beyond counting the presence or absence of particular actors in different sites of an education system and would also consider the ideas and practices associated with gender in a range of institutional processes. These range from policy formation to implementation in a range of different settings such as central government, middle ranks of administration, schools, teacher organisations and civil society groups operating in terrains of a middle space. Critical policy analysis which investigates what the concept of gender 'does' might consider, how power, money and dominant discourses of representation work in education systems and what the gendered dynamics of this entail.

A third set of meanings considers the term gender associated with aims around articulating and defending normative ideas about equalities and advancing women's rights, deepening forms of decolonization, and questioning existing forms of economic, political and social power. In this meaning gender equality in education systems comes to be linked with various formulations around rights, thinking about education as a space to secure and advance equality of capabilities, opportunities and aspiration, and considering the links between education and various forms of social justice and expanded ideas around public good. Here documenting the aims of education systems entails attention to the connection between aims and outcomes, and critiques of sometimes perverse gender effects and might entail responsiveness to voices of dissent from many oppositional interlocutors, or marginally located actors, linking these to consideration of how to consider education systems to achieve more equitable and effective processes and outcomes in education that challenge histories and continued pathways of inequalities, colonization and injustice.

These 'big picture' approaches to thinking about gender and education systems need to be grounded in relation to particular contexts, and nodes of systems such as teacher education or the differentiated education responses to the COVID 19 pandemic. There is a substantial research literature on inadequate school quality in many countries before 2020 (Tikly and Barrett, 2013; UNESCO, 2015; UNESCO, 2016), including evidence indicating that some teachers' content knowledge is limited (see, for example, Spaull 2013; Bunyi et al, 2013; Musa and Dauda, 2014; EDOREN, 2015), but there has been much less research on how teachers' understandings of poverty and inequalities, including gender inequalities, may affect the quality of learning and what features of the education system reproduce these relationships. The pandemic has generated a literature that is both critical and appreciative of teachers, but with little attention to gender issues (refs). Many studies conducted before 2020 indicated that many teachers, currently in work, do not have enough knowledge and training to address the needs of the most vulnerable, marginalized and disadvantaged (for example, ESSPIN, 2011; Westbrook et al 2013; Spaull, 2013; Uwezo 2015). The needs of teachers returning to work has been highlighted as a key concern of UN policy makers, and

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here the care responsibilities of women teachers are given prominence (UN, 2020,) Other studies have highlighted that there is a very significant need to expand the teaching profession, and deepen teacher education and support to understand the issues of poverty, violence and inequalities many children confront (Griffin, 2012; Moon, 2013; Unterhalter, et al, 2014; Parkes et al, 2016). These initiatives, some of which do give consideration to facets of gender, focus on the terrains of a middle space associated with institutions for teacher training , but are much less concerned with the informal associations we have identified linked with the public sphere, smaller organisations, including trade unions, and networks of other kinds of association, which have been noted in blogs and anecdotal evidence published during the Covid pandemic (Brehm, Unterhalter and Oketch, 2021) . However, as the data from the Nigerian surveys indicate, student teachers in training are rather disengaged from the material around gender covered in the formal institutional courses, and their attitudes towards gender equality appear very clearly marked by social norms around them generated from these informal sites of ideas. But the source of these norms in other structures, actions and discourses needs careful documentation.

The key way in which teacher education connects with the education system has been through practice, that is learning through doing, but much of the work on developing practice takes this down to very particular techniques of working in classrooms or with children, and eschews 'big picture' analysis of how these practices are socially located, and build on a range of relationships which entail global, national and local dynamics, in which forms of gender inequality are often in play with other inequalities. (Kramon & Posner 2016; Savolainen et al 2012; Bigelow 2008; Raffo, 2013; Deacon, 2015). Developing and sustaining research and practice to address this needs both formal knowledge formulated through an institutional or organisational terrain of a middle space, and other more informal, contested, or affective domains of knowledge sometimes associated with the more open terrains of a middle space such as the public sphere or networks of associations, and disputes over culture and society. The suspension or limitation of tertiary education in many countries during much of 2020 because of the pandemic brings out the significance of these themes.

But the problem is not only one the content of teacher training and where it is delivered. The data on teacher attitudes around gender gathered in the different Nigerian states shows up the importance of understanding the connections and disjunctures between different terrains of a middle space in the SoP, and the ways in which particular flows of money and people shape elements of an education system. The conditions in which teachers work often exacerbate the limited training they receive. The work conditions for teachers in schools for the poorest children are often exceedingly difficult, with infrequent pay, poor infrastructure, and little support with addressing complex learning needs as has been documented in South Africa (Shalem & Hoadley 2009; Declerq & Shalem, 2014) and was borne out in our study in Nigeria where in the research conducted with teachers working in schools, we found that there was a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between how much teachers said that they do to include children with particular needs in learning, and how much they indicated that they enjoyed their work as teachers. This seems to suggest that those teachers who recognise and take steps to try and address the multiple learning needs of the children they work with feel overwhelmed by this task and unsupported in their efforts (Unterhalter et al, 2018). Teachers are often publicly blamed for children's poor performance in national tests, and this discourse of blame sometimes become part of the rationale not to provide better pay, management and support to teachers (Verger &

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Altinyelken 2012). It can also result in teachers passing on their stress and anxiety to children, with corporal punishment and other forms of bullying or gender-based violence used to coerce children into performing well, as noted by Vanner (2018). Thus gender effects may be evident at different points in an education system associated with particular kinds of flows of ideas, money, or power.

Although many teachers have experienced inequalities themselves, and may, partly, because of work conditions, and partly because of gaps in training and support, be implicated in reproducing these, a number of studies show how training and support can shift views (Pereznieto 2016; Bourn et al, 2017; Grech 2011; Groce et al 2011; WHO 2011; Kett et al 2009). Although work is needed to understand how these processes take place and can be sustained, it could be that understanding education as a system of provision as outlined by Fine (see, for example, Fine 1994, 2010) in which material cultures deployed in different terrains of a middle space play an important part in reproducing inequalities. And generating productive spaces for change.

However, our data highlight important differences of the contexts of teachers' work in the five Nigerian states and many facets in the relationships of teachers and student teachers. All the states have inequalities in education provision, some of which are regional, some relate to social class, others to gender, ethnicity, and political affiliation often intersecting with each other. Studies with teachers in a number of sub-Saharan African countries have found that their own childhood experiences of violent punishment or sexual violence influence their confidence in their capabilities to address violence and discrimination in their classrooms (Dreyer 2001; Chege & Sifuna 2006). Thus, the multiplicity of contexts make it difficult to talk of a single education system. Some interventions have sought to bypass the diversity of the human interaction entailed and have offered solutions that claim quick fixes or that technologies can overcome the issues with the quantity and quality of teachers (Winters, Oliver & Langer, 2017; Laurillard 2007 and 2008; Pachler 2007; Rijsdijk et al 2011). The reach and claims about technological solutions amplified during the pandemic. But technology and rapid 'microwaving' interventions cannot substitute for the relations between people that enable research, teaching and learning as interconnected forms of practice in different terrains of a middle space that can help challenge and change the many different forms of gender inequalities in an education system.

Our research highlights the importance of understanding the social locations of teachers, student teachers and lecturers in teacher education institutions, the space they inhabit and how these shape their engagement with ideas around gender. Some of the terrains of a middle space that would need to be understood in order to make sense of the data we collected relate to the content around gender and intersecting inequalities in the press, films, books, TV, and on social media, forms of ownership and control of these resources and how these have helped to shape the public sphere. We would need to develop a fine-grained analysis of gender dynamics associated with the institutions, both the legal frameworks and the forms of state bureaucracies and local government education authorities in the different states. There are considerable differences between states with a huge growth of private education in Lagos, and a much state centred institutional form in northern Nigeria, each associated with different historical pathways around gender relations. The relationships of organisations, be these largely secular associated with forms of civil society or religious, the strength and orientation of trade unions, and researcher groups, the presence or absence of women's right groups would all need to be documented, as would the networks of

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political and ethnic affiliation, economic and other forms of exchange, and the gender dynamics at work.

Our analysis of gender, teacher education and education system research suggests that context, structure and agency are key components of understanding the relationships and processes that shape terrains of the middle space. An education system and its connection with gender and other inequalities cannot be understand 'simply' in mechanical forms of only connecting or aligning organisations and institutions. Nor can gender be understood largely in terms of descriptive categories of what gender is, or particular norms, which evades examination of ownership, embodiment, political power, and what gender analysis does and aims for. Thinking about teacher education in relation to education systems needs to take account of long chains of association that form the SoP and reach across global, national and local sites of realisation. These entail complex relationships in which vulnerability may be evident as much as power and hierarchy. Sites for the disruption of forms of inequality are varied, fragmented and themselves highly mutable and the task of seeking indicators for this, linked to planning and review, requires much critical reflection and participatory engagement to consider selection. There are many meanings of gender and many interpretations of the notion of an education system, but the importance of disentangling the different dynamics of these is as important for reforming teacher education in the wake of the COVID 19 pandemic as any 'quick fix' around teacher content knowledge or classroom management plans.

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