Rapoport Center Human Rights
Working Paper Series
1/2026

Is the Neoliberal Education Market Gender-Neutral? A Comparative Review of the Global North and Global South

Wajiha Saqib
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy
College of Education
The University of Texas at Austin
wajihasaqib@utexas.edu

The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice

Dedicated to interdisciplinary and critical dialogue on international human rights law and discourse, the Rapoport Center's Working Paper Series (WPS) publishes innovative papers by established and early-career researchers as well as practitioners. The goal is to provide a productive environment for debate about human rights among academics, policymakers, activists, practitioners, and the wider public.

Abstract

Over the past several decades, neoliberal ideology, including concepts of marketization and competition, has entered public education. For example, we see charter schools, aka Public-Private Partnerships schools (PPP), expanding globally. Neoliberal policies often downplay the role of gender in society, and while research has shown how charter schools impact inequalities by race, class, language, and disability, there is little research that looks at gender gaps in charter schools. In this narrative literature review, examining literature from the Global North and Global South and drawing on 38 sources, I conduct a comparative review of gender gaps related to enrollment, retention, and academic performance of students in education and then turn to how these gaps emerge in the context of charter schools. Moreover, my review examines how gender gaps in charter schools vary across contexts. I ask: a) To what extent do charter schools impact gender gaps in education for students? and b) How does this relationship vary across the Global North and Global South? These questions are essential to understanding the nuances of gender in a neoliberal education market from a global comparative lens, which is missing in the scholarly literature at present.

Keywords: Charter Schools, Public Private Partnerships, Gender, School choice, "girl child" education, "boy turn" education

Is the Neoliberal Education Market Gender-Neutral? A Comparative Review of the Global North and Global South

Introduction

Charter schools, also known as Public Private Partnership schools (PPP)[1] operate as part of the neoliberal education system of privatization and marketization. The assumption is that in such a system, competition between different private entities will motivate them to perform better and be more productive, and in that way the market-forces will hold these entities accountable, and their main objective would then be to serve and satisfy the consumer—the public or parent in the case of education. (Whitty & Power, 2000; Ladd, 2002; Lubienski, 2006; Zancajo, 2019). Their main goal is to use market principles of accountability and competition, to provide an equitable education (Lubienski, 2003; Fryer, 2012; Jabbar, 2016; Afridi, 2018; Aslam, Rawal, & Saeed, 2017), an education that is inclusive of all regardless of race, class, and gender.

Advocates of charter schools state that these competitive, market-based models force PPP/charter schools to innovate, improve, and introduce education reforms in order to mitigate educational inequities. Unlike traditional public schools, charter schools are not subject to regular government regulations regarding curriculum and have the freedom to have their own hiring or firing teachers. Within charter schools, the public funding follows the student. Hence, more students means more funding for the school. Thus, competing for students becomes one of the main goals of these schools (Lubienski, 2003).

However, the "marketization" of education theoretically assumes that a competitive environment leads schools to bring in education reforms which attract not just any students but especially those who are hard to reach or who are being poorly served by the traditional public schools (Afridi, 2018; Rooks, 2020). According to charter schools advocates, these institutions have been involved in helping governments impart education and help serve those populations which have been either a) hard to reach

[1] Throughout this paper, I refer to these institutions as "PPP/charter schools" to capture the various terminology used internationally to describe them.

like in rural Punjab, Pakistan where public schools are not easily accessible (Afridi, 2018); or b) served by poor public education services such as Black and Brown children in poor neighborhoods in the United States (Rooks, 2020). By serving these marginalized student population, advocates of charter schools claim they help reduce inequities in education.

While advocates of PPP/charter schools claim that market forces lead to competition which holds schools accountable, and reduce the gaps in education, it has yet to be seen how this market-driven model of PPP/charter schools addresses gender disparities in education (Corcoran & Jennings, 2016). Gender disparities in education is a nuanced topic to study because its nature varies across the global contexts—in most of the developed world, like the United States, the gender gap centers on the under-performance of boys, especially Black and Brown boys, and in most developing countries, like in Pakistan, it centers on the under-performance of girls from lower socioeconomic strata of the society. And while gender disparities exist in education globally across the Global North and Global South, PPP/charter school models also exist globally across the Global North and Global South, intending to mitigate inequities in education, yet there is very little comparative literature that looks at how gender inequities in education are addressed by this global model of neoliberal education. This comparative work on gender can help us understand how PPP/charter schools interact with context-based inequities in education, providing not only insight into gender disparities but also a unique theoretical test of how markets interact with and shape disparities in education more broadly.

Methods

For this literature review, I conducted a thorough search on five categories: 1) "*Charter Schools and Neoliberal Education Market*" 2) "*Gender Gaps in Education in the US and Other Countries*" 3) "*The "boy turn" Education Problem in the United States and Other Countries*" 4) "*The "girl child" Education Problem Globally*" and 5) "*Charter schools and Gender Gaps in Education in the US and Other countries.*" These categories inform the five basic strands of literature and appear in the literature review with sub-sections.

Initially, I started with the first two strands of literature, but as research from these searches helped me understand that globally gender gaps are functioning either as the "boy turn" or the "girl child" education problem, I looked at my third and fourth strands of literature. The last strand was used to see if there is any literature on charter schools and gender, which led to all sorts of themes including literature on gender and leadership and gender and teachers, which are not part of this literature review, as this is focused only on students.

To conduct my search, I used the University of Texas (UT) at Austin's library databases, which are: Education Source, Educational Administration Abstracts ERIC, and SocINDEX. I looked at peer-reviewed articles from 2000 to 2025. Most of the literature I found was from the United States, although there was some relevant international research. Some specific search terms that I used are *Neoliberalism and Charter Schools*, *Gender Gaps in Education*, "*boy turn" Education Problem*, "*girl child" Education Problem, Gender Enrollment Gaps*, *Gender Achievement Gaps*, R*etention Rates and Gender Gaps*, *Dropout Rates and Gender Gaps*, *Charter Schools*, *School Choice*, *Public-Private Partnership Schools*, *Gender and Charter Schools*, and *Gender and Public-Private Partnerships*.

Since these databases did not have sufficient international literature on gender and PPPs, I used Google Scholar for global research. In Google Scholar I used similar search terms as used in UT library databases. Google Scholar was helpful for finding international literature. It was difficult to identify whether all international research was peer reviewed or not, so I had to check that manually, using websites like "Ulrichsweb." Some of the reports mentioned in this literature review by organizations like The World Bank or Oxfam are not peer reviewed but are relevant, especially in the case of developing countries.

In this literature review, firstly, I will review the history and background of PPP/charter schools. Then, I look at gender gaps in education that appear in formal education in the Global North and Global South, and thirdly, I review how they appear in PPP/charter schools across the Global North and Global South. Finally, I look at the gaps in literature and provide recommendations for future research.

Background and Context

The private sector has historically been involved in imparting education in the forms of religious schools, small propriety organizations, civic organizations, and many other forms. However, in the 1980s, the rise of globalization and the shift in governance structures that encouraged private sector influence on education inspired the arrangements captured under the term Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) (Robertson et al., 2012). With a shift towards a global political economy and neoliberal globalization, various public sectors moved towards the open market, which allowed them to provide public services in collaboration with the private sector. The idea was that in an open market, market forces would generate competition, which would lead to market-based accountability amongst different service providers (Robertson et al., 2012).

As this neoliberal political economy emerged, developed countries like the United States and the United Kingdom shifted their governance structures to rely on the open market in education, by creating these PPPs for various educational services, be it the textbook industry, schooling, or assessments (Ali, 2012). The increase in private sector involvement was gradually adopted from the Global North to the Global South due to globalization and because of the push for educational reforms from international organizations, like the World Bank and UNESCO. So, PPPs in education became prevalent not only in the Global North but also in the Global South by the 1990s (Ali, 2013; Robertson et al., 2012).

Globally, some of the most common PPPs in education have been in professional development, standards and assessments, textbook industry, and school choice programs, such as charter schools, voucher policies, and "adopt-a-school" programs and schemes promoting government subsidized low-cost private schools (Aslam, Rawal, & Saeed, 2017; Bano, 2008; Cohen et al., 2017; Lakes & Carter, 2011). PPPs in education emerged in developing countries like Pakistan because international financial and development organizations, such as the World Bank, pushed for education reform based on PPP to bridge the opportunity gap and make education accessible to all—an initiative they termed Education For All (EFA). EFA is a United Nations initiative that is tied to Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that education is a basic human right, and everyone has a right to

education (Nations, 2023). EFA became the basis for one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—SDG 4: Ensuring Inclusive, Equitable, and Quality Education and the Promotion of Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All, which is another United Nations effort designed to address the challenges of universal education by setting targets (United Nations, 2022). In developed countries like the United States, cumbersome bureaucratic structures in education governance, low-performing schools, and lower test scores on standardized testing in comparison with other countries led to new models of educational provision in the education sector through market-based reforms based on PPP, in the form of charter-led turnaround movements, voucher policies, and other public-private partnerships with the goal of increasing equity in education (Lubienski, 2003; Roland G. Fryer, 2012; Jabbar, 2016).

In Pakistan and the United States, many private and non-profit entities have been brought on board to help improve the performance of the low-performing schools (Afridi, 2018). While in the United States Charter Management Organizations have mostly been brought in to help with school turnaround, in Pakistan, private schools and non-profit entities have been brought in to adopt low-performing schools, to help improve the performance and accessibility (enrollment and retention) of these schools (Aslam, Rawal, & Saeed, 2017). Of these various PPPs in education, PPP/charter schools have been the most common phenomenon globally.

The charter school model was first adopted in the Global North and has expanded to the Global South. Charter schools have become commonly known as Public-Private Partnership (PPP) schools in most countries. In the United Kingdom they are known as academies (Department for Education, 2023), while in Chile, they are referred to as subsidized private schools (Zancajo, 2019). In some countries, they are considered part of the public sector, in others, part of the private sector, and in some cases part of a hybrid Public-Private Partnership (PPP) sector. They have different names in disparate contexts, yet they all operate on the same basic principle: public funds are used by private entities to provide education, based on the principles of a neoliberal market economy, particularly free-market capitalism with minimum government intervention. This funding is provided on the basis of per pupil enrollment in the

school. For this literature review, I use the term PPP/charter schools to refer to charter schools in different parts of the world.

In some cases, PPP/charter schools are institutions that were previously traditional public schools operated by the government, which have been handed over to a private entity for management like the "adopt-a-school" program in Pakistan. In other cases, new schools opened by a private entity apply to become charter schools so that they can receive public funds, even as they are managed by a private entity. This format is quite prevalent in many states in the United States (Bano, 2008; Patrinos et al., 2009). While these different neoliberal education models of PPP/charter school differ in their mechanisms, their commonality is that they are schools that are public-private educational partnerships between the state and private entities. These schools are publicly funded by their state governments and are privately managed by private entities which are in partnership with the state governments. It is on the basis of this fundamental commonality that they are examined in this literature review.

Gender Gaps in Education

The gender gap in education is an important issue faced globally. In developed countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, many in Western Europe, and some of the middle-income and low-income countries in the Caribbean regions, sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America, there has been an emphasis and rising concern regarding the performance of boys in education, known as the *"boy turn"* education problem (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Boys are left behind in K-12 education in literacy engagement, have higher rates of expulsions, have higher dropout rates, have higher diagnoses of ADHD, and have lower college enrollment than girls. In the majority of cases in these developed countries, the boys are who lag in education are boys of color (Weaver-Hightower, 2003; UNESCO, 2022). However, in some developing countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria, the gender gap has the opposite issue of the *"girl child"* education problem: girls lag in enrollment, have higher dropout rates, are outperformed by boys in literacy and numeracy (Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), 2023; Rehman et al., 2023). While the "boy turn" education problem and the "girl child" education problem

occur in different contexts and sometimes in drastically different circumstances, they are two sides of the same coin, as they point towards gender inequities in education.

Despite the claim by proponents of PPP/charter schools that they eliminate inequities in education, research shows that disparities in education persist in PPP/charter schools (Rhim & McLaughlin, 2001; Gebhard, 2002; Khwaja et al., 2002; Estes, 2004; Hastings et al., 2006; Whiting & Feinauer, 2011; Fennell, 2014; Marsh, 2018; Ansari, 2020). Many scholars have noted the inequities in PPP/charter schools by race, class, language, and disability, but less work has focused on gender inequities in charter schools (Hastings et al., 2006; Corcoran & Jennings, 2016; Jabbar et al., 2016; Ansari, 2020). While gender disparities exist in traditional public schools (TPS) as well as PPP/charter schools, unlike PPP/charter schools, TPS do not operate on the neoliberal principles of market economy. Although there is government oversight in TPS and there are efforts and reforms made to mitigate inequities in education, market-forces are not at play in TPS and so the neoliberal claim of gender-neutrality cannot be made in the case of TPS.

There are few comparative studies that look at the way gender gaps are addressed by PPP/charter schools globally. The "boy turn" problem is a significant problem, specifically in the Global North, but how charter schools address this problem in different contexts is missing in literature. Similarly, the "girl child" education problem is prevalent in the Global South, but there is hardly any literature that looks at how PPP/charter schools address this gender gap in education in different countries. So, it is important to understand how the gender gaps that are found to be significant globally, are being addressed by similar neoliberal education models of PPP/charter schools from a global comparative perspective, and moreover, to analyze how these similar neoliberal education models address the gender gaps in different national and cultural contexts.

The neoliberal theory assumes the PPP/charter schools operate in a gender-neutral environment, so by that logic PPP/charter schools should be providing equal educational opportunities for all irrespective of gender, but a small emerging body of research suggests otherwise (Corcoran & Jennings, 2016; Jabbar et al., 2016; Ansari, 2020). This small yet significant body of research shows that

PPP/charter schools do not always close gender gaps in academic achievement, enrollment, retention, or sometimes even in access to education, and the way these gaps appear in PPP/charter schools varies across the globe (Khwaja et al., 2002; Fennell, 2014; Marsh, 2018; Corcoran & Jennings, 2016).

Some literature addresses the gender gaps in education from a comparative lens, but it is not specific to PPP/charter schools. Some studies look at the underachievement of boys using international standardized tests like PISA or TIMSS (e.g., Hermann & Kopasz, 2019), but these do not identify the students' school type, whether traditional public schools or charter schools. Other literature studies boys' underachievement at charter schools, but only in the US context (see, e.g., Hastings et al., 2006; Corcoran & Jennings, 2016; Jabbar et al., 2016; Marsh, 2018), without a comparative international component. For the "girl child" education problem, studies mostly collect data from household surveys or government organizations that do not specify the school type, which makes it impossible to see how the "girl child" education problem is being addressed in PPP/charter schools. There is a small body of research on charter schools and girls' education, but this research (Khwaja et al., 2002; Fennell, 2014; Ansari, 2020) is limited to South Asia only and likewise does not have an international comparative component. Thus, an international comparative analysis would help us understand whether, in different global settings, the market-driven education system addresses gender gaps, particularly whether it mitigates or ameliorates these gaps.

It is important to acknowledge that in most gender and education research, data captures and measures gender as a binary category of men and women. However, as an emerging scholar of gender and education, I recognize that gender is not universally a binary category of male and female (Monro, 2007), so this view of gender in educational literature is narrow. While this exclusive view of gender has its limitations and does not encompass all genders, it is still important to understand the gender gaps in a neoliberal education market with this binary understanding of gender. Due to the above-mentioned limitations, I will use gender as a binary category for this comparative literature review when studying gender gaps (i.e., the "boy turn" and "girl child" problems in education.)

Literature Review

To understand the gender gaps in education, specifically the "boy turn" and "girl child" education issues, I examine literature that explores the possible causes of these problems. For the "boy turn" issue in formal education, I first review studies from the United States and worldwide to highlight some of the reasons scholars attribute to boys falling behind in education. Initially, I explore the reasons for boys' relatively low performance, focusing on both biological and sociological explanations. Then, I analyze how some literature supports or questions these claims. Next, I review studies that examine the school environment and how some scholars blame the "feminization" culture of schools for boys' lagging, while others refute these arguments. Finally, I consider how the neoliberal education economy attributes lower performance to boys themselves and how scholars critique these perspectives.

Furthermore, to understand the "boy turn" problem in the PPP/charter school sector, I look at what the literature says about the boys' performance in charter schools. This literature hails from the United States only. I highlight the "no excuses" charter schools and their disciplinary policies being discriminatory towards boys, especially boys of color. I look at literature that elucidates how the "boy turn" problem in charter schools in the US occurs at the intersection of gender and race. In this section, I also address how sometimes class intersects with gender, along with race, for boys' poor performance in education, specifically in charter schools.

I then broaden my review of literature from around the globe. I bring in analyses of the causes of girls' lagging in education in the Global South, highlighted by international organizations like the World Bank and UNESCO, to understand the "girl child" education problem. I look at some qualitative as well as quantitative studies from several African and South Asian countries, which highlight girls' poor performance and lack of access to education. These studies also show the reasons for the "girl child" education problem.

Secondly, I move to the "girl child" education problem and PPP schools. This literature hails mainly from South Asia. I highlight what various research says about the impact of PPP schools on girls' education. The findings from this research are mixed; some attribute PPP schools mitigating the "girl

child" education problem and some say there is no impact. I further delve into how researchers look into the cultural factors of girls lagging in education in South Asia, specifically with regards to PPP schools.

Finally, I move to the gaps in literature on the "boy turn" and the "girl child" education problems with regards to the way PPP/charter schools address them at a global level. Highlighting these gaps in literature, I give recommendations for future research.

I examine gender gaps in education related to enrollment, retention, and academic performance of students and how this varies across the Global North and South in formal education in general and specifically in PPP/charter schools and how the gender-neutral presumption of the neoliberal market influences that gap. Through this literature, I reveal how gender gaps in PPP/charter schools play out differently across transnational contexts. As mentioned earlier, PPP/charter school models have historically flowed from the developed Global North to the developing Global South, so it is crucial to note that these PPP/charter school models are quite similar globally, yet there is no comparative literature that looks at how boys and girls experience them in different contexts, particularly with a focus on equity. Therefore, it is important to investigate how the gender gaps are highlighted or diminished by the competitive, market-driven approach of the charter schools.

To understand gender gaps in education, it is important to understand the sociological difference between gender and sex as explained by Unger (1979) i.e., sex differences are the biological differences between males and females (persons assigned male at birth and persons assigned female at birth) while gender refers to the sociocultural factors that affect how males and females experience life with respect to their biological sex. When boys' relatively lower performance in education is studied in the Global North and when girls' relatively lower performance in education is studied in the Global South, some literature only looks at the difference in sexes and lists these differences as the probable causes of the gender gaps in education, while other scholars look at the way gender roles play a part in how boys and girls are treated in schools and generally in society, and identify these social constructs as the probable causes of the gender gaps in education.

Gender Disparities in Education

The 'boy turn' problem in formal Education – Comparative Literature Review

As established earlier, the "boy turn" problem – where boys lag in education is a gender issue in education mostly identified in developed countries. Weaver-Hightower (2003) explains that while girls previously lagged in education in most of the developed world, by the 1990s this situation reversed and in K-12 girls outperformed boys in education, so policymakers and education researchers started identifying boys' poor performance in education as a policy challenge. Hence, this was termed as the "boy turn" problem. Literature tells us that there are various reasons for boys falling behind in education. Research from the United States and elsewhere has investigated various causes for boys performing poorly in education as compared to girls. These causal analyses look at boys' academic performance irrespective of the kind of school they attend, whether a traditional public school or a PPP/charter school, hence these causes draw our attention to the general beliefs and perceptions about boys' poor academic performance as compared to girls. Some of these reasons from literature are explained in the following sections.

One strand of research that looks at boys' under-performance focuses on the behaviors and social skill sets alongside psychological differences of boys. Yet other research critiques these lenses, focusing instead on disparate treatments of boys as situated within their school environment. Below, I review these bodies of work.

Disciplinary Issues and Special Education Needs of Boys. As noted, there is a large body of research that attributes boys' under performance to relatively worse behavioral skills (i.e., sustaining attention, persistence to perform tasks) and social skills (i.e., impulsive responses, ability to control anger, sadness, joy, and other emotions) than girls, which makes it hard for them to do well in academics and cope with school discipline policies (DiPrete & Jennings, 2012). Some studies have found that these disparities are the reasons they are categorized as special needs students (DiPrete & Jennings, 2012; DiPrete & Buchman, 2013). DiPrete and Buchmann (2013) in their study found that the gender gap in education favored girls as they showed better social and behavioral skills than boys (as reported by

parents and teachers), which led them to pay more attention in school and perform better in academics. This research used quantitative analysis on panel data from four decades of high school students, derived from the National Education Longitudinal Study. One of the main findings of this research showed that boys in high school were more likely than girls to skip school, to get into fights and to get into "self-reported" trouble in school (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013). In this study, it is to be noted that boys getting into trouble was self-reported by the high school students, so there is a chance that this affects the accuracy of this finding. However, the low attendance of boys in high school indicates that boys were lagging behind girls in high school regardless of the accuracy of "self-reported" trouble.

Research suggests that boys' relatively lower social and behavioral skills, which impact their academic performance, are not limited to high school students but are also evident in K-5 education, as demonstrated by DiPrete and Jennings' (2012) study of a nationally representative sample of approximately 11,000 kindergarteners followed through fifth grade. The study employed factor analysis to measure indicators of social and behavioral skills—such as lack of attention, inability to control anger and other emotions, and impulsive responses—as well as students' grades in school, reading and math test scores, and evaluations from parents and teachers. Their results showed that in kindergarten, girls outperformed boys on both the social and behavioral scale and the learning scale. Even after controlling for family background, ethnicity, reading, and math skills, this gap persisted. The study found that although boys scored higher than girls in math tests in kindergarten, this gap narrowed by grade 5. Conversely, in reading, girls led boys in kindergarten, and this advantage did not diminish by grade 5. Overall, the literature suggests that girls tend to have an educational advantage over boys, primarily because of their better social and behavioral skills—according to teachers—even after accounting for teacher bias, socioeconomic status, and race (DiPrete & Jennings, 2012). So, the question then is, what might explain these differences?

Psychological Differences by Gender. Another body of work from the field of educational psychology has explored reasons for gaps in social and behavioral skills noted above. This work has sought to explain these through a viewpoint of biological differences in sexes; yet some scholars question

whether these biological differences are solely responsible for boys' disruptive behaviors in the classroom or whether there is more to the story. Some research connects rates of boys' mortality rates at birth and physical vulnerabilities at birth, which are greater than those of girls (Elsmén et al., 2004; Gregory et al., 2022), and explain that as a reason for boys' lower social and behavior skills (Schore, 2017). While these scholars use the physical vulnerabilities of boys as a reason for their behavior, they do not draw any causal links between these vulnerabilities and boys' relatively lower social and behavior skills. They do not have sufficient evidence to link these. Other literature uses psychological reasoning to look at the difference in hormone levels of boys and girls and use that to explain the reported disruptive behavior of boys. Halpern (2013) uses evolutionary psychology theory to investigate probable causes of the reported disruptive behaviors of boys, concluding it could be a result of differences in the sexes attributable to hormone levels. She used research on brain imagery to claim that male and female brains have different activities when they engage in cognitive tasks. She stated that neurobiological and psychological research on hormonal studies had shown causal links between cognitive abilities and the fluctuation of the levels of testosterone and estrogen in the human body (Halpern, 1997, 2013).

Despite showing these results and the links between hormonal levels and their neurobiological and psychological effects, Halpern (1997, 2013) herself questioned these biological reasons, drawing upon literature which showed that socialization has an impact on girls' and boys' behaviors. She stated that the "nature-nurture" debate in psychology elucidates how girls and boys are socialized from infancy, which leads to some of the differences in cognitive abilities, and so she argued that environment and biology were inseparable when understanding gender. However, Halpern (2013) does not delve into the social contextual /school factors that might be the cause for boys reported lower social and behavior skills in classrooms.

Furthermore, there is research that looks at how from a very young age, girls and boys exhibit different kind of emotional regulation, where girls express internalizing emotions like sympathy and anxiety, etc., and boys exhibit externalizing emotions like anger and contempt etc., and while these emotions appear at a very early age, they do not necessarily due to the differences of sexes but actually

they could be learned behavior and could be due to the difference of gender (Chaplin & Aldao, 2013). Even biologists like Brody and Hall (2010) claim that physiological differences in emotions cannot always define how girls or boys behave because the response to their emotional expressions by their parents and the society in general affects their behavior. Looking at these scholars' claims, the question then becomes how much of the biological reasoning is responsible for boys reported disruptive social behaviors and how much is the sociological aspect of the ways boys are treated in schools and in the society in general, has to be taken into account to understand their reported disruptive behaviors. It is important to note that while research on the biological reasoning of boys' relatively lower scores on behavior and social skills ratings may give us some probable explanation about boys' learning behaviors, yet they do not draw any causal links with boys' physical vulnerabilities and their reported disruptive behavior in the classroom.

Therefore, it is important to understand how the social environment, particularly the school environment, treats boys. Some scholars of social psychology claim that teachers perceive boys' lower social skills in classrooms as an anomaly that requires special attention and therefore, they categorize boys with such behaviors as special needs students (Robinson, 1997; Algozzine, 2017). This tells us that even if there is a biological difference, which might be related to boys' relatively lower social skills and reported disruptive behaviors in the classroom, the education system deals with it by perceiving it to be a disability. Whether these lower social skills are for biological or environmental reasons or both, the way they are viewed with a deficit lens leads to a higher ratio of boys than girls being grouped into the special needs category. So, it depends on how the schooling culture caters to the reported disruptive behaviors of boys and if it does not cater to these behaviors appropriately, boys' learning is going to be affected more than that of girls.

"Feminization" of School Culture. Since the 1990s, when the conversation on the "boy turn" issue became a hot debate in the Western world, there are scholars who attribute the problem to the school culture as being "feminine" for not attending to the needs of boys and for rewarding girls' better social behavioral skills (Skelton, 2012). This notion of the school culture being feminine claims that school

culture encourages docility and compliance, which are considered feminine behaviors and are harder for boys to navigate (Henning-Stout, M., & Conoley, J. C., 1992; Skelton, 2012). Additionally, research showed that boys perform worse than girls in noncognitive skills and have behavioral difficulties, with scholars attributing schools' feminine culture as the major cause of this (Beaman et al., 2006). Beaman et al. (2006) identified two Australian government reports about K-12 education which stated that boys have not only performed worse than girls in student achievement since the 1990s, but the gap had been increasing over time. They concluded that historically schooling has become "feminine," as the profession of teaching worldwide has more females than males, since the latter half of the 20th century. However, the reports did not draw any causal findings that link boys' poor academic performance to the "feminine" school culture.

There have been scholars who have questioned altogether the claim that educational culture is "feminine" (Verniers et al., 2016) and others who have questioned the negative effects of the feminized school culture on boys (Francis, 2006; Griffiths, 2006; Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Skelton, 2012). While most of the literature about schooling being a feminine profession and schools having a feminization culture affecting boys' learning in a negative way blames the school culture, none of these studies or reports have substantial evidence that links the feminine environment with lower academic performance for boys. Most of this literature is theorizing using psychological theory and highlighting the arguments that policymakers are making, without any substantial empirical evidence. Indeed**,** there is literature that contradicts these findings (Francis, 2006; Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Verniers et al., 2016).

Globally, policymakers argue that female teachers do not serve as role models for boys and the classroom environment becomes more feminine, which is not productive for boys' learning (Francis, 2006). But Carrington & McPhee (2008), in their small qualitative study in the UK using interviews with male and female teachers and students, negated these claims and showed that for most students, the gender of the teacher did not matter. The limitation of this study is that it has a small sample size and

cannot be generalized, but it still gives us insight into how the gender of the teacher has no effect for the students.

However, there is other research with a relatively large sample size that seconds the above-mentioned findings. Marcel Helbig (2012), in his international quantitative study, showed that the "feminization of school culture" of schooling—which is defined to be two-fold, first the greater number of female teachers in K-12 education, and secondly the "girl-friendly" environment of school (Helbig, 2012, p. 662; Skelton, 2009)—did not have any effect on boys' learning. This study used data from 39 OECD countries to see whether same-sex teacher-student matching in mathematics and literacy produced better achievement scores in PISA, TIMSS, and PIRLS. The study found that while in some countries a female teachers teaching girls correlated with an improvement in their mathematics and reading scores, in none of the countries did male teachers teaching boys correlate with an improvement in their reading or mathematics scores. As this study looked at data from multiple countries and had a large sample size and controlled for school characteristics, its findings can be generalized at least in the context of OECD countries, if not globally.

Another quantitative study (Verniers et al., 2016) with a large sample size looked at 1,954 students (1,115 girls and 839 boys) from grades 7, 9, 10, and 12 in France who were asked to report which characteristics were exhibited by boys and girls for success in school. The characteristics of compliance, assertiveness, intelligence, and effort were associated with success in school using factor analysis. The study conducted regression analysis on these characteristics to find out which of them were associated to be exhibited by boys and girls according to the students' perceptions, and the findings showed that compliance, intelligence and effort were associated with girls while assertiveness was associated with boys, therefore the study concluded that the claim of the school culture being feminine was an oversimplified and partial statement. The study expressed that while girls are thought to be more compliant, intelligent, and put more effort in their work, boys' assertive behavior leads them to be successful in school, therefore, to say that the school's feminine culture benefits girls more than boys would not be correct (Verniers et al., 2016).

One limitation of the study is that the students answering the questionnaire about behaviors exhibited by boys and girls, were based on their perceptions of gendered behavior, which could be influenced by the general societal beliefs about gendered behavior, and so could not be taken as the true reflection of the actual behaviors of boys and girls within schools. However, despite the limitation, the findings did add value to debate on the schools' feminization culture and showed that the feminization of school culture does not benefit girls more than boys. And since this study was conducted on a large sample size, the findings from the study could be generalized at least to other European countries with similar school cultures as France. Overall, these studies show that for the Global North, the gender of the teacher does not have an impact on boys' learning and that feminization of school culture does not benefit girls over boys. On the other hand, there is literature that shows that many scholars and policymakers have shifted the blame for the underachievement of boys from the school to individuals. This line of argument has been quite prevalent in the United Kingdom, as discussed below.

Neoliberal Education System and the 'Problem Boys.' Many educationists and policymakers, based on their beliefs about the fairness of the neoliberal education market, hold the underachieving boys responsible for their own "lack of success" and ignore the inequities in the society that drive educational disparities (Francis, 2006; Stahl, 2015; Stahl et al., 2024). Francis describes that in the neoliberal education system, the responsibility of education lies with the individual, so underachieving boys are considered as 'problem boys,' but she questioned the neoliberal market economy's premise of equity (2006). She explained that these 'problem boys' are blamed for not taking the responsibility of getting an education, and for causing trouble for their peers and society. She showed that in the United Kingdom, these "failing" boys were mostly working-class White, African-Caribbean, and Pakistani boys. Francis argued that the neoliberal market education system blames the 'problem boys' for underachieving, while not holding accountable the societal structures such as the socioeconomic class, immigrant status, psychological problems, and race/ethnicity (2006). She questioned the assumption of the neoliberal market that an individual has been dealt a fair share of opportunities and that the education system gives equal opportunities to everyone (Francis, 2006). It is based on this assumption that the neoliberal

education system claims to be gender-neutral, while ignoring the fact that the market exists in the larger society, which is full of inequities, and these are reflected in the neoliberal market as well.

Considering the claim of the neoliberal education market being gender-neutral, it is important to see how charter schools approach the 'boy turn' problem. At present, there is little research that critiques this model, and this research is only from the United States. The next section examines this body of research.

The 'boy turn' Problem in Charter Schools - Literature from the United States

As the previous section identified various causes that are associated with boys' relatively poor academic performance as compared to girls, it yet remains to be seen how boys' academic performance is affected in a neoliberal education market. As mentioned earlier, PPP/charter schools were purported to serve hard-to-reach student populations and marginalized student populations by using the logic of market competition and accountability. It is important to see how charter schools serve boys, especially boys from the most marginalized communities (i.e., boys of color and boys from lower socioeconomic strata (SES).) Therefore, this literature review looks at boys' academic achievements in charter schools to see how claims of market competition and accountability lead to serving the most marginalized student groups, in this case, boys, especially boys of color and boys from lower SES.

An extensive body of research from the United States shows that in charter schools, boys have lower enrollment and retention rates than girls, and various studies attribute different probable causes for this. Some scholars identify charter schools' disciplinary policies as the cause for boys' underachievement, while others blame the inability of charter schools to cater to special needs students, which harms boys more than girls. Also considered is the effect of charter schools' academic rigor policies, which may appeal to girls more than boys, as well as intersection of race and socioeconomic class with gender.

Charter Schools' Exclusionary Policies and the "boy turn" Problem. Research has shown that one probable reason for boys' lower enrollment and retention rates in charter schools could be the strict disciplinary policies (Marsh, 2018). Considering the findings in the broader literature that suggest that

boys have relatively lower social and behavioral skills and drawing from literature showing that charter schools in the United States have stricter disciplinary policies (Marsh, 2018). Corcoran & Jennings (2016) claim that this could be one of the main reasons that boys are less likely to enroll in charter schools and even when enrolled are more likely to leave. They find lower enrollment rates of boys in charter schools through a quantitative longitudinal study, which used 11 years (2000–2010) of Common Core of Data (including charter and non-charter schools) from the National Centre for Education Statistics. They find high attrition rates of boys in charter schools using data of students of Grades 3 to 12 in the state of North Carolina from years 2005 to 2010 (Corcoran & Jennings, 2016). While charter schools' disciplinary policies could be one of the reasons for boys' lower enrollment and retention rates, it is difficult to make this claim with any certainty using this study, as it did not make any statistical causal inferences between the enrollment and attrition rates of boys and charter schools' strict discipline policies.

Some researchers contend that charter schools' inability to support special needs students make them exclusionary towards boys. Corcoran and Jennings (2016) show that charter schools in the United States do not have sufficient special education facilities to cater to special needs students, and since boys are more likely to be categorized as special education students, charter schools are more likely to be exclusionary of them.

Charter Schools' greater appeal to girls than boys. Literature (DiPrete & Buchmann, 2013) suggests that girls perform better in school and are more likely to take rigorous courses: *"*Female students remain different from male students in two principal respects: (1) their choice of college courses and major, and (2) their superior academic performance from kindergarten through high school and college… (pg. 81)." Corcoran and Jennings (2016), drawing from this literature, claim that since most charter schools provide innovative curriculum, this could be a reason that they have a greater appeal to girls than boys, and so indirectly they encourage more girls than boys to enroll and stay enrolled.

A study by Deming et al. (2014) uses the student-level administrative data from CMS linked to the National Student Clearinghouse (NSC)—which is a national database recording college enrollment and degree completion for all colleges in the United States—examines the causal impact of attending a

first-choice school on secondary and post-secondary educational attainment. The study finds a small, yet statistically significant, increase in high school graduation, postsecondary attendance, and degree completion for student that have won the lottery to attend their first-choice school (Deming et al., 2014). The study also shows that these gains from attending first-choice schools are mostly experienced by girls, as it states that girls who attend their first-choice schools are 14% more likely to complete a four-year college degree, while the study finds no significant impacts for boys for post-secondary attainment. The study also showed that boys who won the lottery and go to their first-choice schools showed no difference in college-level coursework, dropped in class-rank, and were most likely to fail end-of-course exams in higher grades. The study states that girls' better response to attending their first-choice school that leads them to complete a four-year college degree, could be related to their behavioral tendencies to adapt better to change in environment (Deming et al., 2014). Another reason they offer for boys' relatively poor performance on winning the lottery is their tendency to respond less productively to competition from their peers, based on research (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007) finding that boys tend to overestimate their performance rank in a group when faced with competition (Deming et al., 2014). While this study provides an explanation for reasons associated with girls' higher gains from being selected into their first-choice schools, they do not have causal data to back these reasons. The study's biggest limitation is that it looks at gender in isolation without looking at race. Data from the study does not state anything about the race/ethnicity of the girls who are performing better after winning the lottery.

While the above-mentioned literature gives a general overview of how charter schools are more appealing to girls, and they perform better in charter schools than boys, it does not go into much detail about the intersection of socioeconomic status, gender, and race. To understand how gender is performed and perceived in a given society, it is important to understand the cultural and political contexts of the society (Butler, 1990). By generally looking at the "boy turn" problem and not engaging with how gender intersects with race and socioeconomic class in the United States, the above studies simplify the discussion. To completely understand the "boy turn" problem in the United States, it is necessary to understand the racial, historical, political, and social context of boys of color. There is some literature that

fills this gap by specifically looking at charter schools and boys of color and the achievement gaps in education.

Race and Socioeconomic Class Intersection with the "boy turn" Problem. Research shows that charter schools' disciplinary policies harm boys of color more, which points us towards the intersectionality of gender and race. Marsh (2018) look at gender and charter schools from a racial standpoint. His study investigates the disciplinary policies of charter schools in the United States, using qualitative interviews. He shows how the strict disciplinary policies of one "no excuses" charter school disproportionately affected Black and Latino boys. The study explains that the "no excuses" charter school had strict disciplinary policies like 'no talking in the hallway,' 'no talking during the class,' and 'holding everyone accountable for their actions.' The school claimed that these policies prepared students for future college and practical life, but Marsh argued that these no-excuses policies put negative labels like "at risk" or "repeater" on students and implement symbolic violence, which they argue leads to students dropping out of school (2018). While this is a case study and therefore not generalizable, it still gives us grounds to question: Can the neoliberal education market mitigate gender gaps in education, without looking at race?

The "boy turn" problem is more nuanced than it appears due to the inclusion of race and socioeconomic factors. Literature shows that school choice has more benefits for White girls as opposed to boys of all races and even as opposed to non-White girls (Hastings et al., 2006). Hastings et al. (2006) looked at the effects of a randomized lottery in a public school district in North Carolina and collected baseline test scores and test scores after students went through a lottery system. They found that White girls had statistically significant improvement in their test scores when they were randomized into their first-choice school. The explanation for this finding is that, to begin with, White girls listed more academically challenging schools as their first choice and spent more hours on their homework than any other group. The other groups were White boys, non-White boys, and non-White girls. The findings stated that White female students were more likely to choose high-performing charter schools, based on test scores, and those with more challenging academic programs. For all other groups the impact of

winning the lottery had a negative effect on their test scores, including the non-White female students (Hastings et al., 2006).

The findings from the above-mentioned study are concerning to see, because they tell us that girls perform better than boys, as long as we are not bringing race and class into question. But as we delve into students who are non-White or students with Free and Reduced-Price Lunch, it would be difficult to make that claim without digging further into it. These findings help us understand that when studying charter schools and gender, race and class are important to look into, specifically in the United States. Hastings et al. (2006) findings also make us question the gender-neutrality claim of the neoliberal education market. If White girls are significantly performing better than all other groups, that shows in some ways the market is favoring one group over the other. In other words, it tells us that the market is not equitable, it does not treat all students equally irrespective of race and socioeconomic class. Secondly, it also draws our attention to the fact that the "boy turn" problem is not only a gender gap, but also an achievement gap where gender intersects with race. Without taking race into account, the "boy turn" conversation is therefore, incomplete.

The "girl child" Problem in Formal Education - Global Literature

While the 'boy turn' problem is a huge issue in gender and education in the Global North, in the Global South, governments, INGOs, and scholars in many countries have identified the "girl child" education problem. According to the World Bank, UNESCO estimates that 122 million girls are out of school (The World Bank, 2022). It is reported that while two thirds of the world have reached gender parity in primary school (K-5), in low-income countries the graduation rates for girls in primary school are still lagging behind those of boys, and for secondary school this disparity worsens. For countries that face fragility, conflict, and violence (FCV), the gender disparity for out-of-school girl children is even more dismal (The World Bank, 2022).

Some of the reasons listed by the World Bank for girls lagging behind in education are: a) gender bias within school classrooms that convey messages to young girls about their lack of abilities; b) labor market disparities based on traditional gender roles that domesticate girls; c) poverty which hinders girls

access to school; d) physical and sexual violence while going to and from school, as in rural areas schools are far away and many families cannot afford transportation to school; e) child marriages, which are still practiced in many rural settings despite being illegal, which lead to girls dropping out of school to start a family and to care for it; f) and most recently, the spread of COVID-19 has led to an increase in dropout rates of girls due to an increase in gender-based violence and teenage pregnancies (The World Bank, 2022).

Empirical Evidence from Quantitative and Mixed-Methods Studies. One aspect that the scholarly literature regularly explores is the role of cultural norms and sexual/gender-based violence against women. Some of the quantitative literature has delved deeper into the question of the "girl child" education problem to understand the reasons for girls' low enrollment and retention in schools. Many of these studies blame the cultural traditional gender norms as the reasons for girls' high dropout rates, but none of these studies show direct causal links between cultural traditional gender roles and girls high dropout rates. At the same time, literature from Nigeria (Nmadu et al., 2010; Alabi & Alabi, 2014; Fatai Ayiki Azeez et al., 2024) seconds some of the findings of the World Bank about cultural norms and traditional gender roles that hinder girls' education. Nmadu et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study of two rural and one peri-urban districts in Nigeria to understand the "girl child" education problem. Using survey research conducted in 2007 and 2008, it showed that while half of the population aged 6-11 years in these districts were girls, 60% of the children enrolled in primary school were males. In 2008 only 36% of the children who graduated from these districts were girls (Nmadu et al., 2010). Furthermore, it found that as girls reached middle school, their dropout rates increased. One of the reasons proposed for this increase was that girls reach puberty in middle school and hence, were considered eligible for marriage according to the local cultural norms. However, since there is no causal evidence of this reasoning in the study, it would be difficult to say with any certainty that parents wanted to get their daughters married as opposed to giving them an education. It is important to investigate what causes parents in these regions to drop their daughters out of school. Is it because of cultural norms or economic reasons or something else?

In Nigeria, the attitudes of parents in getting their daughters married earlier as opposed to getting them an education are opposed in two different studies. Yise (2020) conducted a quantitative study in the northern region of Nigeria, where they did a correlational study of a representative sample of parents to see how their mindset impacts sending their daughters to school as opposed to marrying them early. The findings from this study showed that parents usually preferred marrying their daughters young rather than completing their education, due to societal pressure. The study implied that this mindset was due to the parents' religious and cultural beliefs.

While another quantitative study conducted also in the northern region of Nigeria (Kamaldeen et al., 2012) showed different findings. Parents in this study, while acknowledged that there is gender-based discrimination when it comes to the "girl child" education, and it is based on factors such as poverty, early marriage of girls, and other safety issues of girls while going to and from schools, but more than half the schools in the study sample showed a positive inclination towards girls getting an education. The three most highly ranked factors by parents in this study, as those that hinder "girl child" education, were early marriage, poverty, and pregnancy among girls of school age. And the two highly ranked benefits of girls' education by parents was providing the young girls the best start to life and protecting them from exploitation through child labor. These contrasting viewpoints in these studies tell us that the "girl child" educational issue is more nuanced than it appears. One question that arises after scrutinizing the findings of the studies is, how much of the economic and societal pressures of early marriage of the girl child, influence the parents' attitudes towards their daughters' education.

Similar quantitative studies from different regions, Ghana (Alhassan, 2010), India (Paul, 2019), a comparative study of Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh (Raj et al., 2014), and Malawi (Dunga & Mafini, 2019) proposed cultural norms favoring traditional gender roles that domesticate girls i.e., that focus on girls' roles as mothers and homemakers more than their education and career, poverty, physical and sexual violence while going to and from school, and child marriages as some probable reasons for girls' low retention rates, high dropout rates, and lower test scores in literacy and numeracy as compared to boys. While these studies listed these reasons as probable, they did not investigate the causal links

between these reasons and girls' lower retention and enrollment rates. Without a detailed investigation it is difficult to say why girls are lagging behind boys in education and how much of culture or economics hinders girls' education.

Although the literature mentioned above gives us a snapshot of the "girl-child" education problem, it does not look into how different types of schools impact this issue. But there is some research from South Asia that looks into the "girl-child" education problem and charter schools.

The "girl child" Problem in PPP/Charter Schools - Literature from South Asia

When specifically looking at how the neoliberal education market deals with the "girl child" problem, we find research mostly from South Asia. While PPP/charter schools are a phenomenon in many countries in the Global South, however, we see a dearth of studies on gender and neoliberal education models in most countries. As such, most of the research that looks at the "girl child" education problem and PPP/charter schools, is from South Asia. Research shows that PPP/charter schools' impact on the "girl child" education has been mixed. While charter schools were not initiated in the developing countries for closing gender gaps in education, these gaps became an important conversation as part of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (developed by the UN) in 2002 (Fennell, 2014). And later gender gaps in education became an important goal in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN (United Nations, 2022). One recent study (Ansari, 2020) showed that the gender gap in PPP/charter schools was closing in favor of girls in Punjab, Pakistan, while another (Fennell, 2014) showed that there was no improvement in girls' enrollment and retention in charter schools in South Asia (India and Pakistan).

Empirical Evidence on "girl child" Education in PPP Schools from South Asia. There is some research from South Asia that shows PPP/charter schools have no impact in improving girls' education. Fennell (2014) conducted a comparative qualitative study of PPP/charter schools, private, and public schools in two districts in Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan and in one district in Alwar, Rajasthan, India to understand how gender gaps in education were impacted by the different types of schooling. In each location, 10 schools were selected. She conducted semi-structured interviews and focus groups with

parents, young people in the community, teachers, head teachers, and head officials of the district institutions. Based on these interviews she found that the school type had no impact on the girls' enrollment, retention, and achievement. While it was a significant finding, it was based only on three districts in South Asia, so it cannot be generalized to all of South Asia. Due to her findings Fennell (2014) went on to argue against earlier claims made by Khwaja et al. (2002), who purportedly showed that privatization of schools increased girls' enrollment in education in South Asia (Khwaja et al., 2002).

Khwaja et al. (2002) found that the low-cost private schools' inclusion of women in teaching led to better enrollment rates of girls in these schools as compared to public schools. They found that private schooling made education accessible to girls in rural areas where public schools were scarce. While their findings were related to low-cost private schools that charge a fee and not to PPP/charter schools, yet they highlight the features of privatization which are common in charter schools and private schools. So, the findings of this study can help investigate how these features of privatization impact girls' education in charter schools. However, this study used correlations and not causal inferences to make the claims, so it would be hard to understand why these factors cause privatization to help close the gender gaps in education without taking into account the socioeconomic status and family backgrounds of students attending these schools.

Recent research has connected the socioeconomic status and family background of students in PPP/charter schools to closing gender gaps in enrollment and retention. Ansari (2020) studied schools in Punjab, Pakistan, and looked at how the enrollment trends vary across different types of schools. Ansari examined the Punjab Service Delivery Indicator Survey (PSDIS) data to examine the outcomes for 2917 grade four students, out of which 1531(52.5%) were traditional public-school students, 954 (32.7%) were charter school students, and 432 (14.8%) were private school students. He used students' sex, their socioeconomic indicators, their parents' education, the academic support they received outside of the school as his independent variables in a multinomial regression analysis for boys and girls separately with public school attendance as the base outcome. The study reported that PPP/charter schools were 35% more likely than traditional public schools to enroll girls than boys. Interestingly, it also found that boys

who went to PPP/charter schools were more likely to have educated mothers than boys who went to other types of schools, and that boys who read books outside of school were more likely to attend PPP/charter schools but using these findings the study acknowledged that it was difficult to make any causal connections between parents' preference for PPP/charter schools. Ansari's findings offer significant insight for understanding charter schools and the "girl child" education problem that takes into account the intersectionality of gender, class, and the educational backgrounds of parents. As the sample size of this study is relatively large, and students were selected randomly, the findings can be used to make some generalizations at least about the province of Punjab, Pakistan. However, the study does not delve into why PPP/charter schools enroll more girls than boys or what features of PPP/charter schools attract more girls than boys. It does not look into the cultural and contextual factors of gender and how the PPP/charter schools mitigate those. And, of course, it does not provide a generalizable conclusion as to the Global South more broadly.

While the literature above gives us some insight into how PPP schools served the "girl child," most of these studies (Ansari, 2020; Khwaja et al., 2002) use a western feminist lens to understand the "girl child" and gender gaps in neoliberal education markets. Ansari (2020) and Khwaja et al. (2002) are quantitative studies that take more of a positivist stance, without critically evaluating their findings, which makes their studies narrow and eliminate the cultural and social contexts of their sites. Fennell (2014) digs deeper into the cultural contexts of the "girl child" education problem, and she tries to bring the voices of girls' parents to the forefront, and in some ways deviates from a western feminist lens.

Cultural Factors, the "girl child" Education Problem, and Charter Schools. Judith Butler posits that it is impossible to separate gender from the political and cultural contexts in which it exists (Butler, 1990). Gender is often understood and performed within the social and cultural parameters in which it exists, therefore it is important to understand the cultural factors behind girls' low enrollment, retention, and achievement and see if PPP/charter schools impact them in any way. Fennell (2014) dug deeper into understanding the cultural reasons for girls lagging behind in education in South Asia. She showed that while parents valued education for both their sons and daughters, as they understood that

education led to economic gains, the employment opportunities for girls after an education were limited, and this was tied with a greater cultural belief system of women's traditional roles in the society as mothers and wives. Despite these cultural beliefs hindering girls' employability, she found parents still valued their daughters' education and associated a woman's education more with her self-respect and dignity in society than economic gains resonating with findings from Nigeria (Kamaldeen et al., 2012).

Furthermore, she found that in South Asia, parents associated high value to girls' education but could not often send them to school because of other factors, which were easy access to education, unavailability of washrooms for girls in schools, and prevalent sexual harassment of girls while going to and from school (Fennell, 2014). She did not find any one type of school, either private, PPP/charter, or traditional public school, better at mitigating these barriers to girls' education. Fennell's findings give us an insight into how parents in South Asia value girls' education and show the infrastructural, cultural, and economic reasons that prevent them from getting their daughters educated. This is an important study in understanding that girls' high dropout rates in South Asia are not due to the traditional gender roles which give lesser importance to girls' education, but instead there are other cultural and economic issues related to girls' education, that hinders girls' education. The study does give us a perspective that parents do value girls' education and associate it with a girls' dignity and self-respect. By doing so, this study tries to unpack the social and cultural contexts of the "girl child" education problem and negate the western narrative of blaming religious and conservative traditions as stopping girls from getting an education. However, this study due to a smaller sample size is hard to generalize for all of South Asia. Although this study does not show a single type of school mitigating or propagating girls' barrier to education, it does give us an insight into the cultural and economic reasons for girls lagging in education.

Gaps in Literature for the "boy turn" and the "girl child" Education Problems

The "girl child" and the "boy turn" problems are issues of gender inequities in education that arise in different cultural and demographic contexts. While literature from around the globe shows us different probable causes of these issues, there are still gaps in literature that need to be addressed. As the literature establishes that PPP/charter schools are based on the assumption of a gender-neutral neoliberal

market, they assume that part of their benefits are the closing gender gaps in education. Yet, there is a dearth of comparative literature investigating that assumption.

There is no comparative literature that looks at the impact of PPP/charter schools on gender inequities in education globally. The "boy turn" problem is a significant problem in the Global North, but how PPP/charter schools address this in a comparative global context is missing in literature. Some studies look at underachievement of boys using international standardized tests like PISA or TIMSS (Agasisti & Murtinu, 2012; Hermann & Kopasz, 2019), but these do not identify the students' school type —traditional public schools or charter schools. There is some literature on gender gaps and charter schools from the United States but none from other developed countries. Most of the literature on the "boy turn" problem is not generalizable because of the small sample sizes. And studies with large sample sizes miss out on key critical aspects as the intersectionality of gender, race, and socioeconomic class is not captured. On the other hand, for the "girl child" education problem, prevalent in the Global South, studies mostly collect data from household surveys or government organizations that do not specify the school type. And there is little research on PPP/charter schools and girls' education and this small body of research is limited to South Asia only.

These gaps identify that there is a need to study the "boy turn" and "girl child" problems in education in PPP/charter schools in more depth, especially with regards to the intersection of gender, race, and socioeconomic class. Such research would help understand how the neoliberal education market serves marginalized student groups with regards to gender, race, and socioeconomic class, and would provide scholars and policymakers insights into how neoliberal education models, across the globe can help become more equitable.

Discussion and Future Recommendations

The review of the literature above tells us that whether it is the "boy turn" problem or the "girl child" education problem, both point to a gendered education system and these gender gaps in education are a global phenomenon. This questions the gender-neutral assumption of a neoliberal education market that is the basis for PPP/charter schools. The question then is: Are PPP/charter schools actually

addressing this gendered education system? Unfortunately, existing social science research has failed to thus far address this issue.

The "boy turn" and the "girl child" education problems and charter schools are being studied in silos, without any comparative analysis. Looking at the "boy turn" problem and how PPP/charter schools address it, we see literature only from the United States. Looking at the "girl child" education problem and the way PPP/charter schools deal with it, there are a few studies—from South Asia only. These are either based on small sample sizes or cannot make any causal inferences about PPP/charter schools' effect on girls' education globally, or even in other parts of the Global South. There is no literature from other countries about PPP/charter schools and the "girl child" education problem.

So, one can conclude that at present there is little literature that gauges the impact of PPP/charter schools on gender gaps in education in a global context. Internationally, PPP/charter school models are the same in essence, so a global comparative analysis of similar PPP/charter models' effect on the "boy turn" education problem and the "girl-child" education problem would help understand the nuances of gender in a neoliberal education market.

Furthermore, the literature review shows us that the way gender is understood in most of the studies is very narrow and skewed. First, in most cases, gender is constructed as a binary—girls and boys—which is an exclusionary way of understanding gender. Second, in the case of the "girl child" education problem prevalent in the Global South, we see that the studies use a Western liberal feminist lens to understand the issue. This is especially problematic because gender cannot be studied in isolation from the region's historical and cultural context, as Shenila Khoja-Moolji (2018) explains that the discourse on girls' education cannot be understood by studying gender alone but by examining its intersections with class, religion, and nationhood. Third, regarding the "boy turn" problem, most of the literature reviewed simplifies gender; even when race is addressed, many studies ignore the political and cultural milieu in which the "boy turn" issue has emerged. It is essential to investigate how boys have come to perform poorly in education by understanding the political, historical, and cultural contexts of different countries. To understand gender gaps in education, it is important to understand the social and

cultural contexts in which these gaps emerge, and to do so it is important to understand how gender is perceived as Butler (1990) posits that it is impossible to separate gender from the political and cultural contexts in which it. To understand the “boy turn," the “girl child” education problems, and the impact of charter schools on them, it is important to study gender along with its intersections with race, class, religion, and nationhood, while keeping in mind the cultural and political contexts.

Future research should look at a comparative study between the Global North and the Global South that unpacks how the “boy turn” and “girl child” education appear in two similar models of PPP/charter schools, where the gender gaps are reversed. Since there is a substantive body of literature on the “boy turn” problem in charter schools in the United States, and there is a significant body of literature on the “girl child” education in Pakistan, a comparative case study of the two sites as examples the Global North and Global South, would give greater insights into neoliberal education markets and gender gaps. Such a study would help understand how PPP/charter school models operate in different cultural contexts. A case study methodology for this future scholarship would help unpack the cultural and social contexts of how gender is perceived and performed in the two sites, and how the global neoliberal education market works in similar or distinctive ways in both sites. It would also help policymakers and international educational agencies to come up with a global framework to address gender gaps in education across the Global North and Global South.

References

Afridi, M. (2018). *Equity and Quality in an Education Public-Private Partnership*. OXFAM Research Reports.

Alabi, T., & Alabi, O. S. (2014). Female education: A sociological analysis of girl-child education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review*, *1*(1), 006-013.

Alhassan, E. (2010). Socio-Economic and Cultural Determinants of Girl-Child Education in Gushegu/Karaga District of the Northern Region of Ghana. *Ghana Journal of Development Studies*, *7*(1). https://doi.org/10.4314/gjds.v7i1.61400

Algozzine, B. (2017). Toward an Acceptable Definition of Emotional Disturbance: Waiting for the Change. *Behavioral Disorders*, *42*(3), 136–144. https://doi.org/10.1177/0198742917702117

Ansari, A. H. (2020). Cream skimming? Evaluating the access to Punjab's public-private partnership programs in education. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *72*, 102126. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2019.102126

Aslam, M., Rawal, S., & Saeed, S. (2012). *Public-Private Partnerships in Education in Developing Countries: A Rigorous Review of Evidence*. Ark Education Partnerships Group.

Beaman, R., Wheldall, K., & Kemp, C. (2006). Differential teacher attention to boys and girls in the classroom. *Educational Review*, *58*(3), 339–366. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910600748406

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Routledge.

Carrington, B., & McPhee, A. (2008). Boys' "underachievement" and the feminization of teaching. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *34*(2), 109–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607470801979558

Cohen, D. K., Spillane, J. P., & Peurach, D. J. (2017). The Dilemmas of Educational Reform. *Educational Researcher*, *47*(3), 204–212. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189x17743488

Corcoran, S. P., & Jennings, J. (2016). The Gender Gap in Charter School Enrollment. *Educational Policy*, *32*(5), 635–663. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904816673737

Deming, D. J., Hastings, J. S., Kane, T. J., & Staiger, D. O. (2014). School Choice, School Quality, and Postsecondary Attainment. *American Economic Review*, *104*(3), 991–1013. https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.104.3.991

DiPrete, T. A., & Buchmann, C. (2013). *The Rise of Women - The Growing Gender Gap in Education and What it Means for American Schools*. Russell Sage Foundation, Baltimore, Md.

DiPrete, T. A., & Jennings, J. L. (2012). Social and behavioral skills and the gender gap in early educational achievement. *Social Science Research*, *41*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2011.09.001

Dunga, H., & Mafini, C. (2019). Socio-economic Factors Influencing the Education of the Girl Child in Zomba, Malawi. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, *11*(2).

Davies, B., & Bansel, P. (2007). Neoliberalism and education. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *20*(3), 247–259. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390701281751

Estes, M. B. (2004). Choice for All? *The Journal of Special Education*, *37*(4), 257–267. https://doi.org/10.1177/00224669040370040501

Fennell, S. (2014). Public-Private Partnerships in Education and the Pursuit of Gender Equality: A View from South Asia. *Revue Internationale de Politique de Développement*, *5*(3). https://doi.org/10.4000/poldev.1798

Fatai Ayiki Azeez, Mensah Prince Osiesi, Collins Gboyega Aribamikan, Walters Doh Nubia, Monica Ngozi Odinko, Sylvan Blignaut, Oluwanife Segun Falebita, Oladipo Adeyeye Olubodun, & Titilope Abosede Oderinwale. (2024). Exclusion of the female child from primary education: exploring the perceptions and experiences of female learners in northern Nigeria. *Education 3-13*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2024.2308307

Francis, B. (2006). Heroes or zeroes? The discursive positioning of "underachieving boys" in English neo-liberal education policy. *Journal of Education Policy*, *21*(2), 187–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/02680930500500278
Gebhard, M. (2002). Charter Schools and Bilingual Education: A Case Study of Teachers Negotiating Policy-Making Roles. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *35*(3), 255–264. https://doi.org/10.1080/713845316
Gregory, E. C. W., Valenzuela, C. P., & Hoyert, D. L. (2022). Fetal Mortality: United States, 2020. *National Vital Statistics Reports*, *71*(4).
Griffiths, M. (2006). The Feminization of Teaching and The Practice of Teaching: Threat or Opportunity? *Educational Theory*, *56*(4), 387–405. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5446.2006.00234.x
Halpern, D. F. (1997). Sex differences in intelligence: Implications for education. *American Psychologist*, *52*(10), 1091–1102. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.52.10.1091
Halpern, D. F. (2013). *Sex Differences in Cognitive Abilities*. Psychology Press.
Hastings, J. S., Kane, T. J., & Staiger, D. O. (2006). Gender and Performance: Evidence from School Assignment by Randomized Lottery. *American Economic Review*, *96*(2), 232–236. https://doi.org/10.1257/000282806777211919
Helbig, M. (2012). Boys do not benefit from male teachers in their reading and mathematics skills: empirical evidence from 21 European Union and OECD countries. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, *33*(5), 661–677. https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2012.674782
Henning-Stout, M., & Conoley, J. C. (1992). Gender: A subtle influence in the culture of the school. In F. J. Medway & T. P. Cafferty (Eds.), *School psychology: A social psychological perspective* (pp. 113–135). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
Hill, D., & Kumar, R. (2012). *Global neoliberalism and education and its consequences*. Routledge.
International Standard Classification of Education ISCED 2011. (2012). In *http://uis.unesco.org/*. UNESCO Institute for Statistics. http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf
Jabbar, H., Sun, W.-L., Lemke, M. A., & Germain, E. (2016). Gender, Markets, and Inequality: A Framework. *Educational Policy*, *32*(6), 755–796. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904816673740
Jacklin, C. N. (1989). Female and male: Issues of gender. *American Psychologist*, *44*(2), 127–133. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.44.2.127
Kamaldeen, A. - S., Muhammad Buhari, A. - S., & D. B, P. (2012). Perception, Attitude and Practices of Parents in Okene, Nigeria towards Girl-Child Education. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, *2*(8).
Khwaja, Asim Ijaz, J. Das, and T. Andrabi. "The Rise of Private Schooling in Pakistan: Catering to the Urban Elite or Educating the Rural Poor?" Working Paper, 2002.
Ladd, H. F., & Economic Policy Institute. (2002). *Market-based reforms in urban education*. Economic Policy Institute.
Lakes, R. D., & Carter, P. A. (2011). Neoliberalism and Education: An Introduction. *Educational Studies*, *47*(2), 107–110. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2011.556387
Lubienski, C. (2003). Innovation in Education Markets: Theory and Evidence on the Impact of Competition and Choice in Charter Schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, *40*(2), 395–443. https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312040002395
Lubienski, C. (2006). School Diversification in Second-Best Education Markets. *Educational Policy*, *20*(2), 323–344. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904805284049
Marsh, L. T. S. (2018). School-Imposed Labeling and the School-to-Prison Pipeline. *Boyhood Studies*, *11*(2), 131–148. https://doi.org/10.3167/bhs.2018.110208

McMillen, M. M. (1979). Differential Mortality by Sex in Fetal and Neonatal Deaths. *Science*, *204*(4388), 89–91. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.571144
Monro, S. (2007). Transmuting Gender Binaries: The Theoretical Challenge. *Sociological Research Online*, *12*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.5153/sro.1514
Niederle, M., & Vesterlund, L. (2007). Do Women Shy Away from Competition? Do Men Compete Too Much? *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, *122*(3), 1067–1101. https://doi.org/10.1162/qjec.122.3.1067
Nmadu, G., Avidime, S., Oguntunde, O., Dashe, V., Abdulkarim, B., & Mandara, M. (2010). Girl Child Education: Rising to the Challenge. *African Journal of Reproductive Health Sept*, *14*(3), 107.
Paul, P. (2019). Effects of education and poverty on the prevalence of girl child marriage in India: A district–level analysis. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *100*, 16–21. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.02.033
Phillips, A. (2010). *Gender and culture*. Polity.
Raj, A., McDougal, L., Silverman, J. G., & Rusch, M. L. A. (2014). Cross-Sectional Time Series Analysis of Associations between Education and Girl Child Marriage in Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan, 1991-2011. *PLoS ONE*, *9*(9), e106210. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0106210
Rhim, L. M., & McLaughlin, M. J. (2001). Special Education in American Charter Schools: State level policy, practices and tensions. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *31*(3), 373–383. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057640120086611
Robertson, S. L., Mundy, K., Verger, A., & Menashy, F. (2012). *Public Private Partnerships in Education: New Actors and Modes of Governance in a Globalizing World*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
Rooks, N. (2020). *Cutting School*. The New Press.
Schlosser, L., & Algozzine, B. (1979). The disturbing child: He or she? *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 25*(1), 30–36.
Schore, A. N. (2017). All our sons: The developmental neurobiology and neuroendocrinology of boys at risk. *Infant Mental Health Journal*, *38*(1), 15–52. https://doi.org/10.1002/imhj.21616
Shenila Khoja-Moolji. (2018). *Forging the ideal educated girl. The production of desirable subjects in Muslim South Asia.* University Of California Press.
Skelton, C. (2009). Failing to Get Men into Primary teaching: a Feminist Critique. *Journal of Education Policy*, *24*(1), 39–54.
Skelton, C. (2012). Men teachers and the "feminised" primary school: a review of the literature. *Educational Review*, *64*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2011.616634
Stahl, G. (2015). *Identity, Neoliberalism and Aspiration*. Routledge.
Stahl, G., Asplund, S.-B., & Scholes, L. (2024). Investigating the role of identity versatility in the discursive production of working-class boyhood, learner identities and educational engagement. *The Review of Education Pedagogy & Cultural Studies*, *46*(4), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/10714413.2024.2326391
The World Bank. (2022). *Girls' Education*. World Bank. https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/girlseducation
UNICEF. (2019). *Girls' education*. UNICEF. https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education
United Nations. (2020, January 22). *Recognizing and Overcoming Inequity in Education | United Nations*. United Nations; United Nations. https://www.un.org/en/un-chronicle/recognizing-and-overcoming-inequity-education
Verniers, C., Martinot, D., & Dompnier, B. (2016). The feminization of school hypothesis called into question among junior and high school students. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *86*(3), 369–381. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjep.12111
Weaver-Hightower, M. (2003). The "Boy Turn" in Research on Gender and Education.

Review of Educational Research, *73*(4), 471–498. https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543073004471
Whiting, E. F., & Feinauer, E. (2011). Reasons for enrollment at a Spanish–English two-way immersion charter school among highly motivated parents from a diverse community. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, *14*(6), 631–651. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2011.560931
Whitty, G., & Power, S. (2000). Marketization and privatization in mass education systems. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *20*(2), 93–107. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0738-0593(99)00061-9
Yise, S. A. (2020). Determining Parents' Mindset on Educating the Girl - Child in Plateau State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Science and Research (IJSR)*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.21275/ART20203853
Zancajo, A. (2018). Educational providers in the marketplace: Schools' marketing responses in Chile. *International Journal of Educational Research*, *88*, 166–176. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.10.009
Zancajo, A. (2019). Schools in the Marketplace: Analysis of School Supply Responses in the Chilean Education Market. *Educational Policy*, *34*(1), 43–64. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904819881781