

Boys are still left behind in basic education

Clarissa C. David, Jose Ramon G. Albert, and Jana Flor V. Vizmanos

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) require the country's monitoring of the state of gender disparities, with Goal 5 specifically covering the determination of equitable access to quality education by both sexes. While the country has achieved positive developments in the overall reduction of prevalence of out-of-school children (OOSC), there is no evidence that it supports the closing of gender gaps (David and Albert 2015b; David et al. 2018). Studies revealed a sharp disadvantages of boys in terms of school enrollment, performance, and graduation rates (David et al. 2009; David and Albert 2012).

This *Policy Note* examines the extent of gender disparities in various education performance metrics. It suggests policy recommendations to address the problem of gender disparities in OOSC.

Gender disparities in OOSC

Data on OOSC in this study were derived from the 2017 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey conducted by the Philippine Statistics Authority while interviews were conducted with students at risk of dropping out of school, parents, and school officials to further investigate the reasons for dropping out of school.

Data revealed that two-thirds (65.0%) of OOSC in the Philippines aged 5–15 years in 2017 were boys. A higher proportion of boys (than girls) were found among those aged 5–17 years. School attendance was largely associated with economic status of the family. Three-fifths (58.7%) of the 1.2 million OOSC aged 5–15 years in 2017 belonged to families in the bottom 25 percent of the per-capita income distribution. Among the poorest families, boys had a higher likelihood than girls to be out of school. This disparity in school participation between boys and girls at all levels of income persisted since 2008 (David et al. 2009; David and Albert 2012). At least some portion of this may be caused by the need to augment the family income. Since boys can work for income earlier in their lives, mostly as informally employed laborers, they may be pulled out of school at younger ages than girls when the family is poor or low income (DepED et al. 2012).

If 16- to 17-year-old children were included, the overall OOSC rate was higher, reaching up to 8.3 percent nationally compared to the 5.3 percent when only up to 15-year-old children were computed. Boys had lower likelihood of attending school compared to girls regardless of age range, except among kindergarten-age children (i.e., 5-year-olds).

Gender gap in OOSC widened significantly as age progresses (Table 1). In primary school age (6–11 years), OOSC rate for girls was 3.4 percent compared to 5.4 percent for boys. In lower secondary school level (12–15 years old), the OOSC rate for boys nearly doubled at 8 percent while OOSC rate for girls slightly lowered at 3.1 percent. Overall OOSC prevalence increased sharply in upper secondary level (16–17 years old), widening the gap at 22.3 percent for boys compared to 11.6 percent for girls. The K to 12 program was only recently implemented, thus OOSC rates in senior high school (SHS) level may not yet be stable at this time, especially in areas where SHS is still not available. There may be adolescents in this age range who still fall under the 10-year basic education cycle.

Gender gap was also apparent across regions in the Philippines (Figure 1). While the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao had the highest OOSC rate for both boys (13.8%) and girls (10.6%), OOSC rates for boys in SOCCSKSARGEN and Caraga were at an alarming rate of four times greater than that for girls, with disparity of 6.1-percentage points between the sexes.

Comparing the OOSC rates across the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member-states, boys in the Philippines were found to be disadvantaged, just like in Malaysia and Indonesia (Table 2). As cohorts of children advance in school level, the disadvantage of boys became larger. In primary school level, three countries in ASEAN had OOSC rates skewed against boys (Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand) while in secondary school level, Indonesia, in addition to Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand, also demonstrated high OOSC rate for boys. In upper secondary school level, Myanmar and Brunei, aside from the first four mentioned ASEAN countries, also showed high OOSC rates for boys.

The disparity against boys in the Philippines was also evident in performance metrics across different grade levels in public schools, where

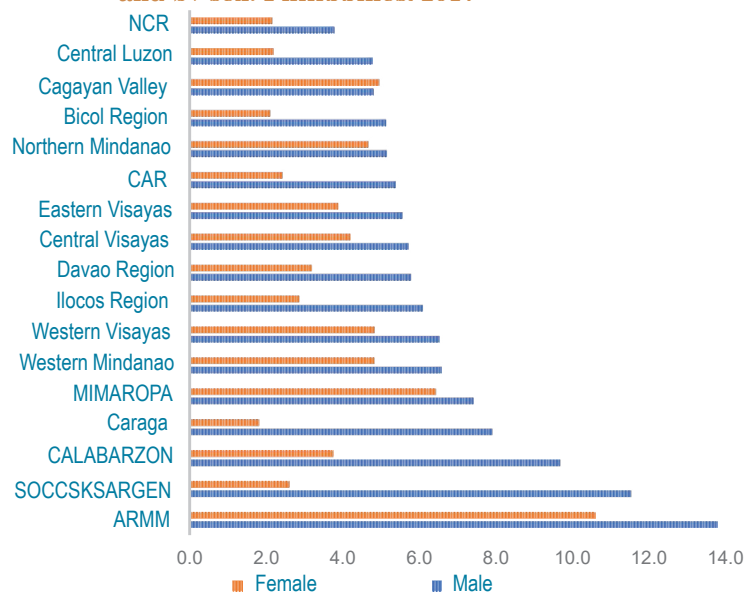
females continued to score better than boys in the national achievement tests both in primary and secondary school levels and in every subject tested (Table 3). In the Grade 6 test, females obtained an average mean percentage score (MPS) of 43 while males scored 37. In Grade 10, females obtained MPS score of

Table 1. Rate of out-of-school children (OOSC) including senior high school (in %), by sex: Philippines, 2017

Age (Years)	OOSC Rate		
	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes
5	9.1	8.9	9.0
6–11	5.4	3.4	4.5
12–15	8.0	3.1	5.6
16–17	22.3	11.6	17.4
Philippines (5–17)	10.7	5.7	8.3
Philippines (5–15) ^a	6.7	3.8	5.3

^a Attention to 5–15 years old is provided for comparability with previous PIDS reports on OOSC.
Source: Authors' calculations based on 2017 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey (APIS) (PSA 2017)

Figure 1. Distribution of out-of-school children by region and by sex: Philippines, 2017



NCR = National Capital Region; CAR = Cordillera Administrative Region; MIMAROPA = Mindoro (Occidental and Oriental), Marinduque, Romblon, and Palawan; CALABARZON = Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon; SOCCSKSARGEN = South Cotabato, Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and General Santos City; ARMM = Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao
Source: Authors' calculations based on 2017 APIS (PSA 2017)

Table 2. Rate of out-of-school children among ASEAN countries at different levels of schooling

Country	Rate (%)											
	Primary School			Lower Secondary School				Upper Secondary School				
	Year	National	Female	Male	Year	National	Female	Male	Year	National	Female	Male
Brunei Darussalam	2017	3.59	3.78	3.40	2014	2.37	1.08**	0.19**	2017	18.35	16.38	20.19
Cambodia	2017	9.44	9.65	9.23	2015	13.29	14.12	12.48	2014	61.25	63.44	59.11
Indonesia	2017	7.27	9.90	4.75	2014	11.79	9.94	13.52	2017	14.94	12.78	16.98
Lao PDR	2017	6.66	7.18	6.16	2017	21.73	22.27	12.66	2017	38.11	41.08	35.23
Malaysia	2017	1.40	1.23	1.55	2017	12.05	10.92	21.21	2017	36.63	32.02	40.99
Myanmar	2017	2.29	7.77	6.57	2017	24.03	22.97	13.13	2017	46.40	42.55	50.21
Philippines	2016	4.55	4.08	4.99	2016	7.32	4.99	9.48	2015	20.23	16.71	23.54
Thailand	2009	1.98	0.98*	1.37*	2017	11.06	10.91	11.21	2015	20.93	21.00	20.85
Viet Nam	2014	1.99	2.28	1.73	2014	7.24	7.29	7.18	2014	26.74	23.98	29.52

ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Notes: *2013; **2011

Source: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics (2018)

Table 3. Performance in the national achievement test by urbanity and by sex: Philippines, 2016–2017

	Science				HEKASI/Araling Panlipunan				Overall			
	Grade 6*		Grade 10**		Grade 6*		Grade 10*		Grade 6*		Grade 10*	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Rural	31	29	37	34	43	35	51	43	41	36	46	41
Urban	34	33	37	35	47	39	52	45	46	40	47	42
Total	33	30	37	34	44	36	51	44	43	37	46	41
	Filipino				Mathematics				English			
Rural	56	48	54	48	35	37	39	36	42	34	48	42
Urban	59	52	55	50	39	37	38	36	49	42	50	43
Total	57	49	54	49	37	34	39	36	44	37	49	42

HEKASI = Heograpiya, Kasaysayan, at Sibika

*Missing values = 31.48 percent; **Missing values = 20.23 percent

Source: Authors' calculations from data provided by Department of Education (2017)

46 while males scored 41. The score differences were most acute in Filipino and HEKASI subjects, but were also observed in other subjects such as Math, Science, and English. Across test subjects and areas of residence, the patterns further showed that the disadvantage of boys was present across all subcategories.

Interviews with parents and teachers suggested that poor performance can often lead to low motivation to continue school, which eventually leads a student to drop out. Boys were more prone to obtain low grades, need remedial classes, and fail to pass or get promoted

to the next school level. Low-performing boys eventually become overaged for their grade level, making them less likely to remain in school. In public schools, students with low academic grades are placed together in the lower sections, which are mostly populated by boys. Chronically lower academic performance of boys must be investigated from the point of view of teaching, especially in the lower grades. Are there features of the learning materials, teaching styles, rigidity of schedules and teaching approaches, and other related input-side factors that are less appealing to boys and make the lessons more difficult to understand?

Reasons for leaving school

Results of the study revealed that the main reasons for not attending school were the lack of interest by the child, the high cost of education, and illness or disability (Table 4). For primary-school-age children, lack of interest was the most commonly cited reason for leaving school, although it decreased by 6-percentage points from 2014 to 2017. Boys were more likely to be reported as lacking interest than girls, but the gender difference grew closer over time. The second most cited reason for not attending school was illness or disability, which was more often cited for girls than for boys. The gender gap between girls and boys was most evident in “cost of education”, the third main reason for not attending school, as cited by 13.7 percent and 6.4 percent of out-of-school primary-school-age boys and girls, respectively.

More children were out of school in the secondary-school-age level, majority of which were boys. Across primary and secondary levels, the most common cited reason for not attending school for both sexes was “lack of personal interest” followed by the high cost of education. Among boys, 60.6 percent were reported by the household respondents as lacking interest while for girls it was 41.8 percent. There is some suspicion that the “lack of interest” reason cited in household surveys may be a lack of parental interest to send their children to school. A recent World Bank report on poverty in the Philippines speculates that parents may calculate that the perceived gains of further education are no longer worth the opportunity cost (WB 2018). Qualitative interviews refuted such speculation and painted a much more complex picture of what explains this particular survey result. Further, opportunity costs versus perceived

Table 4. Reasons (in %) why primary- and secondary-school-age children are not in school: 2008, 2014, and 2017

Reasons for Not Attending School	Primary-School-Age Children								
	2008			2014			2017		
	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes
Lack of personal interest	35.2	27.0	31.7	38.2	30.5	36.0	31.4	27.8	30.2
High cost of education	11.0	12.2	11.5	15.3	11.2	14.1	13.7	6.4	11.4
Too young to go to school	24.6	35.3	29.2	9.5	14.6	11.0	6.9	18.3	10.5
Illness/Disability	10.1	8.7	9.5	33.7	37.1	34.7	27.0	32.5	28.8
Lack of nearby schools	7.4	7.5	7.5	2.1	2.1	2.1	14.0	0.0	9.6
Employment	0.1	0.2	0.1	--	--	--	0.0	2.6	0.8
Other reasons (including school records, marriage, housekeeping)	11.6	9.2	10.5	1.2	4.5	2.1	1.4	1.2	1.3

Reasons for Not Attending School	Secondary-School-Age Children								
	2008			2014			2017		
	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes	Boys	Girls	Both Sexes
Lack of personal interest	54.7	33.9	47.2	51.2	29	44.1	60.6	41.8	53.2
High cost of education	21.9	30.3	24.9	25.2	38.3	29.4	22.4	18.9	21.0
Too young to go to school									
Illness/Disability	5	8.2	6.1	10.4	16.7	12.4	7.8	9.8	8.6
Lack of nearby schools	3.3	5.6	4.1	0.6	2.7	1.3	4.6	4.7	4.6
Employment	9.2	7.8	8.7	6.0	1.9	4.7	3.4	12.5	7.0
Other reasons (including school records, marriage, housekeeping)	5.9	14.2	8.9	6.6	11.3	8.1	1.2	12.4	5.6

Source: Authors' calculations based on 2008, 2014, and 2017 APIS (PSA 2008, 2014, 2017)

4 ♦ Boys are still left behind in basic education

gains in the schooling of children are not considered competing factors even for families living in poverty. No matter how poor a family may be, there is full appreciation of the importance of schooling, and when their children are unable to attend school, it is because the consequences are extremely dire (e.g., whether their family can eat for that day).

Vulnerabilities of boys

Parents and teachers interviewed for this study revealed that a disproportionate number of boys in the higher grades dropped out of school due to peer influence (i.e., *barkada*) and vices. Also, computer and mobile phone-based games were frequently mentioned as reasons for chronic absenteeism and lack of focus. Children lose sleep playing games and come to school still sleepy and dazed. Boys are more likely to engage in computer and mobile games, skip school with their peers, and start drinking and smoking. The older boys get, the more they develop difficult attitude problems, especially if they are falling behind academically.

Recommendations

The gender disparity problem in the Philippine basic education system needs urgent attention. The study showed that boys were at higher risk of dropping out of school or obtaining a failing grade, thus, interventions need to focus more in keeping boys in school. These disparities between the sexes get even wider in higher education institutions, both at the level of admission and then again in completion. Participation in the labor force skews male, with men participating at much higher percentages and a significant proportion was employed in unskilled labor that requires little education (David et al. 2017). By contrast, women participated in paid labor at much lower rates but were more likely to occupy higher salaried positions in the formal sector.

Some promising areas of interventions are in making adjustments in management of classrooms and schools. It appears that teachers know how to run differentiated teaching but have little time to adjust their methods because of many other responsibilities. The Department

of Education (DepED) can design and deploy specific learning materials and tools appropriate to a certain curriculum to accommodate diverse manners of learning. Schools and teachers can be allowed flexibility to design interventions specific to addressing the barriers boys face in learning. Studies showed that activity-based learning using manipulatives, tools, and experiments to illustrate lessons are likely to keep boys interested and motivated. Also, the DepED can provide incentives to schools and teachers who can develop effective learning interventions for boys. Further, the DepED and schools need to enhance coordination with the local government units through the Department of the Interior and Local Government and the local school boards to reduce school absenteeism and to prevent boys, particularly older ages, getting waylaid by peers and vices, including computer games.

Finally, diversifying the teacher workforce to achieve balance between women and men teachers can also have long-term impacts on boys. Teachers are viewed with high levels of respect and authority and likewise model of behaviors and goals for children. Increasing the number of male teachers can provide more models of behavior whom boys can identify with more directly, and perhaps, feel more comfortable sharing their problems with. In groups of older boys with attitude problems, male teachers may have more positive effects toward instilling discipline, even if only because boys may be lacking in male role models at home in cases when the father is not fully present.

Despite evidence about the difference in opportunity costs for schooling for boys and girls, especially at older ages, no change was made to the current grants given under the conditional cash transfer (CCT) program. It is recommended that the DepED work with the Department of Social Welfare and Development to study the possibility of increasing CCT allowances for boys, especially at a later age.

While continued concern over dropouts and OOSC drive the education sector to pursue system-wide solutions,

no specific interventions were carried out to address the unique challenges faced by boys. As evidenced by earlier reports on OOSC (David and Albert 2012, 2015a, 2015b; David et al. 2018), the Philippines has multiple generations of undereducated men raising children alongside more educated women who are not in the labor force. The long-term detrimental societal impacts are large and extend to chronic intergenerational poverty, domestic abuse, violence against women, and low levels of female economic empowerment. Given how much of the OOSC population in the later ages are made up of boys, the absence of a gender perspective in the design of solutions hampers real progress. It is time to treat the underachievement of boys' education as an urgent problem that needs urgent solutions with the ultimate goal of reducing the overall OOSC incidence in the country and attain greater gender parity not only in education outputs but also positive social outcomes. 📄

References

- David, C. and J.R.G. Albert. 2012. Primary education: Barriers to entry and bottlenecks to completion. PIDS Discussion Paper No. 2012-07. Makati City, Philippines: Philippine Institute for Development Studies.
- David, C. and J.R.G. Albert. 2015a. How has basic education in the Philippines fared and what else needs to be done? PIDS Policy Notes No. 2015-08. Makati City, Philippines: Philippine Institute for Development Studies.
- David, C. and J.R.G. Albert. 2015b. Recent trends in out-of-school children in the Philippines. PIDS Discussion Paper No. 2015-51. Quezon City, Philippines: Philippine Institute for Development Studies. https://dirp3.pids.gov.ph/websitcms/CDN/PUBLICATIONS/pidsdps1551_rev2.pdf (accessed on October 2, 2018).
- David, C., J.R.G. Albert, and S. Carreon-Monterola. 2009. In pursuit of sex parity: Are girls becoming more educated than boys? PIDS Policy Notes No. 2009-05. Makati City, Philippines: Philippine Institute for Development Studies.
- David, C., J.R.G. Albert, and J.F.V. Vizmanos. 2017. Sustainable Development Goal 5: How does the Philippines fare on gender equality? PIDS Discussion Paper No. 2017-45. Quezon City, Philippines: Philippine Institute for Development Studies.
- David, C., J.R.G. Albert, and J.F.V. Vizmanos. 2018. Out-of-school children: Changing landscape of school attendance and barriers to completion. PIDS Discussion Paper No. 2018-25. Quezon City, Philippines: Philippine Institute for Development Studies.
- Department of Education (DepED). 2017. Data from the Bureau of Education Assessment. Pasig City, Philippines: DepED.
- Department of Education (DepED), Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2012. All children in school by 2015: Global initiative on out-of-school children. Pasig City, Philippines: DepED. [http://dirp4.pids.gov.ph/webportal/CDN/EVENTS/OOSC Country Report.pdf](http://dirp4.pids.gov.ph/webportal/CDN/EVENTS/OOSC%20Country%20Report.pdf) (accessed on October 2, 2018).
- Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). 2008. 2008 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey. Manila, Philippines: PSA.
- . 2014. 2014 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey. Quezon City, Philippines: PSA.
- . 2017. 2017 Annual Poverty Indicators Survey. Quezon City, Philippines: PSA.
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics (UNESCO-UIS). 2018. UIS stat. Quebec, Canada: UNESCO-UIS. <http://data.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on October 2, 2018).
- World Bank (WB). 2018. Making growth work for the poor: A poverty assessment for the Philippines. Washington, D.C.: WB. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/548291528442369215/pdf/Making-Growth-Work-compressed-final.pdf> (accessed on October 15, 2018).

Contact us

Address: Research Information Department
Philippine Institute for Development Studies
18/F Three Cyberpod Centris - North Tower
EDSA corner Quezon Avenue, Quezon City

Telephone: (+63-2) 877-4000, 372-1291 to 92

Email: publications@mail.pids.gov.ph

Website: www.pids.gov.ph

PIDS Policy Notes are analyses written by PIDS researchers on certain policy issues. The treatise is holistic in approach and aims to provide useful inputs for decisionmaking.

The authors are consultant, senior research fellow, and research analyst, respectively, at the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS). The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the PIDS or any of the study's sponsors.